



2017 Military Service Gender Relations Focus Groups

Active Duty

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2017 Military Service Gender Relations Focus Groups

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The lead analyst on this assessment was Ms. Amanda Barry of Fors Marsh Group. Dr. Jason Debus, Ms. Elizabeth Harper, and Ms. Yvette Claros of Fors Marsh Group and Ms. Elle Gault of Abt Associates assisted in the preparation of this report. Dr. Laura Severance and Ms. Natalie Namrow of Fors Marsh Group and Dr. Ashlea Klahr and Ms. Lisa Davis of OPA assisted with the review of this report. Policy officials contributing to the development of focus group content included Dr. Nathan Galbreath and Ms. Anita Boyd (Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office). We would like to thank all of the individuals at each installation who assisted us in organizing the focus groups.

The data collection team consisted of Mr. Brock Brothers, Mr. Hunter Peebles, Ms. Natalie Namrow, Ms. Mallory Mann, and Ms. Amanda Barry of Fors Marsh Group and Ms. Alison Thuang of Abt Associates.

Executive Summary

The *2017 Military Service Gender Relations (2017 MSGR) Focus Groups* among active duty members are a part of an assessment cycle of the active duty force, which started in 2015,¹ and focus on gender relations, specifically topics related to sexual assault and sexual harassment. This cycle alternates between quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus group) assessments. Surveys provide an assessment of progress over time as well as provide a broad understanding of the dynamics surrounding sexual assault and gender relations. Focus groups provide a more in-depth exploration of specific topics, as well as an opportunity to observe the culture at Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force installations. These two efforts (surveys and focus groups) inform each other in an iterative manner. Combined, these assessments help the Department of Defense (DoD) and Service policymakers assess the effectiveness of their programs and identify opportunities for improvement.

This report uses data from focus groups to explore the perception of issues related to sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other gender-related topics at Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force installations. Results presented in this report are qualitative in nature and, therefore, cannot be generalized to the full population of active duty Service members. Themes should be considered the attitudes and opinions of focus group participants only and not the opinions of all active duty Service members.

Focus Group Methodology

A total of 54 focus groups were conducted by the Office of People Analytics in the fall of 2017 with 384 active duty Service members. Sessions were run by focus group moderators trained on sensitive topics. All sessions were 90 minutes in length and were held in closed-door conference rooms or classrooms on seven installations, including both CONUS, the contiguous United States and OCONUS, outside of the continental United States, locations. Focus groups were clustered by gender and rank.

Moderators focused the discussions to cover topics related to general culture, perceptions of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response/ Sexual Harassment and Assault Response Program (SAPR/SHARP), leadership, attitudes toward sexual assault and sexual harassment, bystander interventions, reporting, digital and social media, and changes over time. Using analytic induction, major themes were identified and coded into key categories. To analyze and categorize topics, the qualitative data analysis software package NVivo was used to code language in the transcripts into thematic nodes. NVivo is a grouping and validation tool that provides comprehensive coverage of topics for summaries of findings.² Findings from analyses are summarized and presented with supporting quotations throughout the report.

¹ Before 2017, this study was referred to as Focus Group on Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Among Active Duty Members (FGSAPR). The first administration of the focus groups was conducted in 2014, before the decision to alternate annually between survey and focus group data collection.

² NVivo by QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012.

Summary of Focus Groups Themes

The perspectives of active duty Service members are invaluable in assessing and understanding the policies and programs designed to address sexual assault and sexual harassment within the four DoD Services. Findings from the focus groups also highlight opportunities for improvement.

Changes Over Time

Throughout the focus groups, participants were asked to comment on what had changed over time in regard to gender-related issues in the military. Both male and female participants reported seeing positive changes regarding reporting, consequences for alleged perpetrators, and general discussions about sexual assault, including a stronger prioritization by leadership. Service member participants also noted an environmental shift in the military and work place, stating behaviors that were once brushed off as a part of the culture are now taken seriously, including the display of sexual imagery, crude comments, and inappropriate jokes. However, some participants indicated believing that this culture still exists but is more covert and less explicit in nature.

Male participants reported that they believed there has been an increase in the number of male victims willing to come forward and make a formal complaint for both sexual assault and sexual harassment. This increase was attributed to younger Service members' understanding of and attitudes toward unwanted sexual behaviors.

General Culture

Participants were asked to discuss their opinions about the general culture at their installation and in their Service. Gaining an understanding of the broader cultural context of each installation included in this study and the military at large is helpful for identifying environmental dynamics specific to sexual assault and sexual harassment. Key themes that emerged centered on gender relations (e.g., differences between genders) and alcohol usage.

When discussing day-to-day interactions at their installation and work environment, male participants expressed some discomfort with interacting and providing feedback to female Service members. This discomfort was evident to female participants, with many indicating that they believed male Service members are uncomfortable during exchanges with women and that uneasiness leads to male Service members interacting differently with colleagues depending on their gender. Both male and female participants reported that they believed that this discomfort may stem from a fear of possibly being accused of sexual assault or sexual harassment, resulting in some male Service members exercising caution when interacting with female colleagues, or avoiding interacting with female Service members altogether.

Some male participants indicated that they believed female Service members could and sometimes would use their gender to their advantage, for example, to avoid consequences for negative actions or to advance in their careers. Meanwhile, female participants stated they are sometimes not taken seriously or respected as much as their male counterparts, by some members of leadership and by some of their peers, as a result of gender biases. Additionally,

female participants indicated that leadership tends to be more protective (e.g., does not assign them specific tasks or let them participate in certain activities) of female Service members than male members. This sentiment was echoed by male participants, who similarly felt a need to protect female Service members.

Participants described their workplace culture as male-dominated and, despite the progress they have observed, inappropriate gender-related jokes or scenarios still occur. They described that this culture of gender-related jokes and scenarios could lead to opportunities for perceived sexual harassment and/or sexual assault, whereas others stated it sometimes creates a work environment that lacks professionalism.

Outside of work, many participants indicated that they believed that alcohol consumption plays a large role in socializing at their installations. Participants noted that alcohol is almost always involved in social activities on and off base and many participants saw alcohol consumption as an important part of military culture. They noted the risks that come with alcohol consumption, such as lowered inhibitions and an impaired decision-making ability.

The SAPR/SHARP Program

All focus groups participants were aware of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR)/Sexual Harassment and Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) program, but had mixed opinions about the program. Participants with a positive view of SAPR/SHARP reported believing that the program trains Service members well on how to use the resources offered and to understand their options should they experience an assault. Participants with a less positive view generally had a limited understanding of how the SAPR/SHARP program operates.

Female participants indicated that the program protects victims by maintaining their privacy and exercising discretion. In contrast, some male participants indicated SAPR/SHARP advocacy is one-sided and favors the victim over the alleged perpetrator; some participants indicated that they believed the program does not offer alleged perpetrators the benefit of the doubt before the completion of a formal investigation.

Participants engaged in lengthy discussions focused on training provided by the SAPR/SHARP programs. Both male and female participants commented that SAPR/SHARP training was valuable the first time it was received, but they felt repeated presentation of the same training was ineffective. Specifically, participants across all groups reported that they believed that after repeated SAPR/SHARP training, they experienced training fatigue and felt that the program was just “checking the box.” Participants suggested some opportunities to improve training, including incorporating more variety in the type of scenarios presented (e.g., male victims, female perpetrators) and tailoring scenarios to the different ranks of the Service members in attendance.

Overall, the majority of participants were able to verbalize how to use, find, or access various SAPR/SHARP resources, but there was a small group who reported that they felt services are not as accessible as they could be to all Service members.

Leadership

To fully understand the efforts of preventing and responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment, it is important to gauge leadership involvement and support. Male and female focus group participants described the importance of leaders “leading by example” and displaying a commitment to preventing and ending sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military. Participants indicated believing a major role of officers and senior enlisted members is to create a healthier gender-related culture and to promote gender equality through their actions. Male participants expressed that leadership makes a concerted effort to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment on installations and directs a “no tolerance” policy. Female participants reported feeling that some immediate supervisors do not set a consistent tone with respect to appropriate gender-related behaviors, noting that attitudes seem to vary based on mood or assignment. Male participants stated that the increase in female leadership on base has helped to set a good example of proper conduct for all Service members.

Some senior male participants, who were members of leadership, expressed hesitancy to engage in sexual assault prevention efforts or encourage reporting. These participants cited this was due to concern for potentially being accused of misconduct or feeling uncomfortable with the nature of the topic. Specifically, senior male leaders discussed a fear of being brought up on SAPR/SHARP-related charges if they broached these topics. Meanwhile, many female participants said that they would not be comfortable disclosing any information about sexual assault or sexual harassment to higher ranking Service members.

General Perceptions of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Participants of the *2017 MSGR Focus Groups* were asked a variety of questions to gain perspective about their general thoughts and attitudes toward sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military. Overall, participants indicated that they felt confident about which behaviors constitute sexual assault, but were less sure about identifying behaviors that constitute sexual harassment. Many male participants said that they believed that sexual harassment is open to interpretation and that some Service members may be unaware that their behaviors or comments toward another Service member might be considered sexual harassment. Meanwhile, most female participants indicated that they have become accustomed to some types of sexual harassment (e.g., inappropriate touching, comments, jokes) from Service members and believed that their male colleagues do not view these inappropriate behaviors as potentially harmful or as reaching the threshold for sexual harassment. Confusion around consent and alcohol emerged as a theme in all sessions, and many participants reported feeling that alcohol is a key contributor to the incidence of sexual assault.

Bystander Intervention

Participants in the *2017 MSGR Focus Groups* discussed their views on topics related to bystander intervention as a means of preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment. Topics included the role of leadership in encouraging bystander intervention, characteristics of those who intervene, and barriers to stepping in to stop a risky situation from escalating. Across all groups, participants highlighted the importance of leadership’s role in educating and encouraging subordinates to take action through bystander intervention and by modeling those actions in his

or her behavior. Female participants cited the military's core principles of courage and duty to fellow Service members as important shared values that might encourage Service members to intervene, while similarly, male participants asserted that they are encouraged to intervene, and those who do so are praised for their actions. However, male participants said they have less confidence that they would intervene if the potential victim were male and the alleged perpetrator were female.

When asked about barriers to intervening, both male and female participants identified a number of hurdles. One barrier that was indicated was the presumption that those who intervene may be accused of ruining a "good time" or of being a snitch, and therefore, would suffer social repercussions. Participants also indicated believing some might fear getting others in trouble, viewing intervention as a violation of loyalty and trust among Service members. Others noted some Service members might feel uncomfortable intervening in situations in which they feel they may be intruding in someone else's business or the alleged perpetrator is of a higher rank than the bystander.

Female participants provided several reasons as to why Service members might be less likely to intervene when potential sexual harassment incidents occur. Some stated Service members might be confused about which behaviors constitute sexual harassment, whereas others noted there may be general dismissiveness of sexual harassment behaviors. Some also said they believed that they are conditioned by some of their peers and members of leadership to accept sexual harassment as a consequence of working in a traditionally male-dominated environment.

Reporting Incidence of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Participants were asked to discuss some factors related to filing a report of allegations of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Many Service member participants indicated feeling that the military provides a supportive environment for reporting allegations of sexual assault and sexual harassment, and installation leadership encourages such reporting. However, others perceived limited support for reporting from some of their peers and some members of leadership.

Male participants were split on whether they felt comfortable reporting or would have a positive attitude toward a fellow Service member who reported allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment. Both male and female participants indicated that they believed male Service members are less likely than female Service members to report incidents of sexual assault or sexual harassment.

Participants also listed a number of barriers to reporting, including complex circumstances (e.g., when one or both parties involved have consumed alcohol), fear of getting others in trouble, the length of the investigation process, lack of privacy associated with the investigation, fear of social retribution or professional reprisal, rank of the alleged perpetrator, and issues around being a male victim (e.g., being perceived as weak, threats to masculinity).

Additionally, numerous male participants believed that "false reports" of sexual assault and sexual harassment occur frequently, whereas female participants did not share this belief. Female participants indicated that they felt male Service members perpetuate the illusion that

false reporting is a common occurrence, which can create a stigma around reporting and serves as a powerful deterrent to reporting.

Social and Digital Media and Gender Relations

A topic of interest during the *2017 MSGR Focus Groups* data collection was the use of social and digital media and its relationship to gender-related behaviors.³ Participants discussed using a number of social media websites and applications, including Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram. All participants said it is common for Service members to share both consensual and nonconsensual, sexually explicit images or messages through social media and texting. Participants also discussed other ways of sharing these images, including the use of shared drives and “bumping” phones⁴. Older participants reported that they felt this behavior is common with younger Service members.

Some male participants who shared photos without the subject’s permission did not believe this behavior was inappropriate or warranted reporting or intervention. Female participants were more confident that their female counterparts would remove or report inappropriate comments, images, or videos if they were aware of it. Meanwhile, most focus group attendees were aware of “revenge porn,” the sharing of sexually explicit photos of a person without their consent as an act of reprisal for a perceived wrong. Some female participants indicated they would not be sympathetic toward female victims of revenge porn, because they chose to send the material and were presumably aware of the risk and potential consequences.

Many participants noted that social media makes it easy to engage in harassment compared to face-to-face interaction due to a higher degree of anonymity and distance from the harm that is caused to the victim.

Synopsis

The perspectives expressed in these groups are instrumental in assessing and understanding the dynamics surrounding sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other gender-related issues within the Services. The ongoing program of alternating surveys and focus groups conducted with active duty Service members strives to inform the Department and Service leadership of timely issues associated with unwanted gender-related behaviors and to identify potential cultural and environmental factors that can be addressed to reduce these behaviors. The body of this report contains a wealth of information on these topics. Although this report alone cannot answer all questions about unwanted behaviors that are experienced by active duty Service members, it is a powerful source of insight from the Service members themselves that cannot be obtained otherwise.

³ In 2017, the contents of a closed Facebook page, “Marines United,” were publicly reported on by the media. The platform was used, in part, to exchange and share photos of active duty and retired female Service members.

⁴ “Bumping” phones refers to an app that allows users to share contact details, photos, videos and other files by touching two phones together.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Department strives to provide a safe, healthy, and productive working environment for all its personnel. Working with the Services and the Department of Defense (DoD) Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), the Department has implemented programs to reduce sexual assault and sexual harassment while updating reporting and victim care procedures. Recurring evaluations of the gender relations environment through ongoing mixed-methods research (i.e., surveys and focus groups) inform the development of improvements to policies, procedures, and trainings aimed at reducing instances of sexual assault and sexual harassment and advancing care.

Focus groups are one evaluation tool used to collect qualitative feedback from active duty Service members on the gender relations environment at their locations and in their Service. Section 577 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2005 required the Secretary of Defense to develop a comprehensive policy to assess the DoD's response to sexual assaults involving members of the Armed Forces. Subsequent policy established SAPRO and provided the Secretary of Defense a reoccurring evaluation of the services and resources provided to military members who have reported sexual assault to DoD authorities. The Health and Resilience (H&R) Division within the Office of People Analytics (OPA)⁵ conducts annual assessments with an alternating cycle of focus groups and surveys, providing qualitative and quantitative data to the Secretary of Defense and Service policymakers. The alternating cycle resembles the assessment cycle employed at the DoD Military Service Academies (MSA) pursuant to U.S. Code 10 as amended by Section 532 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for the Fiscal Year 2007.

This report offers findings from the *2017 Military Service Gender Relations (2017 MSGR) Focus Groups* among active duty members. This is the third⁶ administration of gender relations focus groups. This introductory chapter provides background on why these focus groups were conducted, a review of the methodology used to administer the focus groups, an overview of the report, and an introduction to key terms. References to perpetrator/offender/the accused throughout this report should be interpreted as “alleged perpetrator” or “alleged offender” or “alleged accused.” Without knowing the specific outcomes of particular allegations, the presumption of innocence applies unless there is an adjudication of guilt. References to “retaliation,” “reprisal,” “ostracism,” or “maltreatment,” or perceptions thereof, are based on the negative behaviors as reported by the focus group participants; without knowing more about the specifics of particular cases or reports, this data should not be construed as substantiated allegations of retaliation, reprisal, ostracism, or maltreatment. Therefore, no legal conclusions can be drawn on whether behaviors meet the definition of an offense having been committed.

⁵ Before 2016, the H&R Division was located within the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). In October 2016, the H&R Division was moved into the newly formed Office of People Analytics.

⁶ Before 2017, this study was referred to as Focus Group on Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Among Active Duty Members (FGSAPR). The first administration of the focus groups was conducted in 2014, before the decision to alternate annually between survey and focus group data collection.

Methodology

OPA conducted 54 focus groups⁷ on gender relations with active duty Service members across four services (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force) at seven locations from October 10, 2017, to November 8, 2017. The Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force selected two installations: one CONUS, the contiguous United States, and one OCONUS, outside of the continental United States, and the Army selected one OCONUS installation for data collection. A list of the selected locations can be seen in Table 1. Each group was conducted in 90-minute sessions with a moderator trained in sensitive topic facilitation. In total, 384 active duty Service members participated in the data collection. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary.

Table 1.
Installation Location by Service

Service	CONUS Location	OCONUS Location
Army	N/A	Camp Buehring and Camp Arifjan, Kuwait
Navy	Hampton Roads, VA	Yokosuka, Japan
Marine Corps	Cherry Point, NC	Okinawa, Japan
Air Force	Malmstrom, MT	Aviano, Italy

The focus group guide was broken into six sections: *General Culture, Perceptions of the SAPR/SHARP Program, Bystander Intervention, Alcohol, Reporting and Retaliation, and Prevention.*

Although the results cannot be generalized to the population of the Services, they provide insights into issues and ideas for further consideration. Data collection was discussion-based and, therefore, while many subjects were addressed, not all questions were asked in all groups and not all participants were able to answer each question. Procedures for selecting participants, developing the questions, conducting the groups, and analyzing the data are described below. The focus group procedures were reviewed by a DoD Human Subjects Protection Officer as part of the DoD survey approval and licensing process.

Participants

Study participants were selected from the general population at each installation and may or may not have direct experience with sexual assault and/or sexual harassment. Those who were selected and volunteered were recruited to participate in one of eight groups held at each of the

⁷ Eight focus groups were conducted at each location per Service, with the exception of the Marine Corps locations where seven groups were conducted at each location.

installations. Groups were broken out by gender and paygrade.⁸ See Figure 1 for a detailed layout of the groups conducted.

Figure 1.
Participant Group Breakout



Participants were recruited via e-mail. Each Service installation supplied OPA with a roster of all eligible participants. After randomizing each list within clusters defined by gender and paygrade, rosters were returned to each installation point of contact. Each Service installation was responsible for recruiting the first available 12 active duty Service members to participate in the appropriate session. Each installation was required to emphasize that participation was voluntary, and participants were able to discontinue participation in the study at any time. For this reason, the size of the sessions varied. The breakout for each gender and paygrade can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2.
Participant Counts by Gender and Paygrade

Paygrade	Male Participants	Female Participants
Junior Enlisted (E1–E4)	49	40
Senior Enlisted (E5–E9)	64	67
Junior Officer (O1–O3)	48	47
Senior Officer (O4–O6)	48	21
Total:	209	175

⁸ At the CONUS and OCONUS Marine Corps installation, there were no groups with female senior officers.

Development of the Guide

Working with SAPRO to identify topics of interest, OPA analysts created the initial draft of the focus group protocol. OPA incorporated collaborative feedback from SAPRO before finalizing the focus group guide. The guide was broken into six parts:

1. General Culture
2. Perceptions of the SAPR/SHARP Program
3. Bystander Intervention
4. Alcohol
5. Reporting and Retaliation
6. Prevention

Each section covered multiple related topics, including questions on leadership, socializing, barriers to intervention, and barriers to reporting. The guide can be found in Appendix B.

Conducting the Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted on site at each installation in closed-door conference rooms or classrooms. Sessions lasted 90 minutes, and facilitators trained in focus group moderation and sensitive topics led the sessions. Groups were led by facilitators of the same gender (i.e., male groups were led by a male facilitator; female groups were led by a female facilitator). Focus group sessions were recorded using digital audio recorders and later transcribed off site.

Analysis

Data from the focus groups were analyzed using analytic induction,⁹ a multistep method. First, the data were organized by installation, removing any personally identifiable information (PII) or other identifying information. Next, using qualitative analysis software (NVivo), the team coded data into key themes and analysts developed assertions, which stated possible findings. Transcripts were coded and verified by two analysts to avoid individual bias. Once the data were compiled for each assertion, researchers determined whether to keep, revise, or eliminate the findings based on the support and contradictions for the assertion. Assertions are summarized in the subsequent chapters of this report. Quotes that exemplify key findings reached through the analytic induction process are included throughout the report.¹⁰ This report offers an overview of findings across all installations and Services. Service-specific assertions are noted when necessary.

⁹ Erikson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M.C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, (3rd ed., pp.119–161).

¹⁰ For clarity throughout the report, filler words (e.g., “like,” “um,” “you know,” “yeah”) were removed from quotations and explicit words are indicated by [explicit] where removed.

Findings for male and female participants are presented in separate chapters. Each chapter presents themes on general culture, leadership, the SAPR/SHARP program, general perceptions of sexual assault and sexual harassment, bystander intervention, reporting, social and digital media, and changes over time:

- Chapter 2 provides a summary of major themes across the Services by **male** participants,
- Chapter 3 provides a summary of major themes across the Services by **female** participants, and
- Chapter 4 provides a discussion of major themes across Services and gender.

Chapter 2: Male Participant Themes

The perspectives of active duty Service members are invaluable in assessing and understanding the policies and programs designed to address sexual assault and sexual harassment within the DoD. Findings from focus groups also highlight opportunities for improvement. In this chapter, a discussion of themes that emerged among male focus group participants is presented.

Chapter 3 explores themes that emerged among female focus group participants. Key themes include participants' thoughts around general culture, leadership, their perceptions of the SAPR/SHARP program, sexual assault and sexual harassment, bystander intervention, reporting of alleged incidents of sexual assault, digital and social media, and changes over time.

General Culture

Participants were asked about the general culture at their installation and in their Service. This discussion of the broader cultural context of the installation and the military at large helped set the stage for a better understanding of the dynamics surrounding sexual assault. Key themes that emerged centered on gender relations and alcohol.

Gender Relations

Male participants discussed aspects of gender relations both at their installation and within their Service, including the topics of situations that are unfair to men, masculine culture, professionalism, and alcohol use.

Situations That Are Unfair to Men

Although many participants expressed support for gender equality (e.g., equal access, regardless of gender, to promotion, MOS), they noted that gender biases and discrimination still exist at their installations and in their Services. Reactions were mixed at each installation when discussing topics related to the masculine environment, uniforms, perceived advantages of being female, and discomfort in interacting with members of the opposite gender.

Male participants indicated that they believed that the military is changing some of its long held “gendered” standards, such as the dress code or segregated boot camp. These shifts were sometimes discussed as frustrating, particularly around different uniform standards. Many male participants held an opinion that there is no emphasis on following the dress code for female Service members and that their female counterparts are able to violate uniform codes without consequences.

“There’s no emphasis on following the dress code for females or how females can do whatever the hell they want in my opinion.”

– **Army OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

Participants also expressed concern that some female Service members may use their gender as an advantage, for instance, to avoid getting in trouble for misconduct, performing their duties, or following the rules. Many male participants reported feeling uncomfortable providing critical

feedback on female colleagues' performance due to the fear of a Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) or Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) complaint. Consequently, numerous male participants reported feeling that they need to be careful when interacting with female coworkers and believed there was a double standard, since they did not feel the need to be as careful with male coworkers. This double standard was thought to negatively impact interactions between men and women. Furthermore, out of a fear of being brought up on SHARP/SAPR charges, male Service member participants indicated that they take extra precautions when correcting a female by having another female present during the conversation.

“How are you going to go up to a female and say, ‘I can see your underwear.’ SHARP, EO, right then and there.”

– **Army OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“So, as a male, and all the males in my section, all the males that I know, are very careful on how they talk to a woman, how they get along in front of a woman, but a woman does not have to. And it seems to be like that with all minorities. I think right now I could be considered one. But even when it comes to other minorities, all they got to do is say something and—specifically, females. And to me and the Soldiers that I have, the male Soldiers, that's really demoralizing if that's the correct word. It brings morale down because they can get away with it.”

– **Army OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

In addition, some participants expressed the belief that women should not be in the military because they have different abilities. Further, some participants were frustrated that women are not required to perform their job to the same level as male Service members.

“I think that honestly just goes back to a couple thousand years of stereotyping of just military, in general, is male dominated. So then when women come in and they get different standards and stuff, I think that rubs some people wrong.” – **Navy OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

An additional concern voiced by some male participants was the need to protect their female colleagues. Some male participants communicated that they will not hire or send a female colleague out to certain sites because she may be sexually assaulted and/or harassed. Some male participants indicated that if a female colleague were sexually assaulted and/or harassed, they would be held responsible for failing to prevent the assault and/or harassment.

“So being SHARP-focused, because we train it all the time, you know what? I'm not going to probably send one of my females out to this site. I'm not going to send my female out to a site, a Podunk [fresh of the boat] FOB where it's a bunch of infantry dudes. So you don't do that. And then you get

the EO complaint because, ‘You didn’t send me because I’m a female.’ So now what?” – Army OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male

Masculine Culture

The masculine culture observed at the installations emerged as a central theme throughout the groups. Many participants discussed inappropriate gender-related jokes or scenarios that could be perceived as sexual harassment/and or assault. In the military environment, however, female Service members are perceived as being tolerant and accustomed to such remarks.

“In the way I see it, [it] is for one unit, the girls are used to what these guys say and they all get along. And these guys really talk bad guy stuff, but the girls that are in their unit, they know. They hear it all the time so they’re accustomed to it, I guess you could say.”

– Army OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

Professionalism

Many male Service members who participated in the focus groups indicated that they believed professionalism in the military is decreasing. This was especially true for the OCONUS locations. Participants pointed to a number of factors that underlie this perceived decrease.

Male participants pointed to the young age of most military members as a major contributor to the lack of professionalism. Participants reported believing that the military lowered its standards in recent years, which has resulted in recruiting Service members who are immature compared to previous recruits and lack knowledge of what constitutes work-appropriate behavior. Some male Service member participants discussed a pervasiveness of improper workplace culture (e.g., inappropriate language, touching, relationships), and a general lack of knowledge and inexperience.

“I think the people who are coming into the Navy, because they’re so young, they don’t know what they want to do with their life. So, when they come in, they’re not ready to be a professional sailor. They’re still just figuring out who they are and what they want to do.”

–Navy OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

Alcohol

Alcohol was viewed as playing a large role in socializing at all installations where data were collected. In this section, we discuss alcohol use in general. A later section presents a discussion of the role of alcohol in sexual assault. At OCONUS installations, participants perceived alcohol to be more accessible than at CONUS locations. Although several members may choose to drink on and off base, Service members who participated in the focus groups noted that they try to be responsible by following polices and avoiding driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol. Even though underage drinking is prohibited, it is still prevalent across installations.

Alcohol in Social Situations

Across installations, participants emphasized that alcohol plays a significant role in socializing with colleagues, whether during game night at someone's house or going out for drinks, typically, off base. However, some male participants stressed the importance of drinking responsibly, including scenarios like having a plan for the night or limiting their amount of alcohol.

“You get promoted and you buy people alcohol and that’s just the military culture.” – Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male

“It’s still something we bond over. We’re turning more and more, as we get older, away from the, ‘Let’s go out and get smashed,’ more into, ‘Hey, let’s go out and have a couple of drinks. Let’s not turn this into a negative situation. Let’s keep it positive. Keep it responsible.’”

– Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Male

DUI Charges

Although DUIs were not discussed at every installation, participants that did discuss concerns related to DUIs noted that their leadership takes the issue very seriously. Because of consistent messaging from leadership regarding the consequences of drinking, participants noted Service members choose not to drink on base. Specifically, there was a strong emphasis at the OCONUS and CONUS Marine Corps and CONUS Air Force installations

“You can, but there’s no—you can’t just go out—you can’t drink and then start driving even though you’re below 0.08. It’s zero across the board. You get caught anything above a zero, it’s a DUI on base. So, it’s not really funny, in a sense, but we, as an organization, condone drinking. Which, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it as long as you do it responsibly. But the threshold for mistakes with use of alcohol is very strict. And I think that’s why you don’t see many people drink on base anymore at the O clubs, at the E clubs.” – Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male

Underage Drinking

Although underage drinking is illegal and, therefore, not allowed on installations, participants across all seven installations indicated that underage drinking occurs. At the OCONUS installations, male participants expressed that alcohol is readily available off base, and typically, drinking restrictions, such as checking identification, are not enforced overseas. However, it was reported that on base, age limitations are enforced and will not be “pushed under the rug.”

“Japan doesn’t card anybody [laughter]. So you just go off base.”
– Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

“It gets taken seriously. If it’s any kind of a problem and it makes it up to leadership, it’ll get handled and won’t get pushed under the rug.”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

Perceptions of the SAPR/SHARP Program

The Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) is the DoD office responsible for the oversight of sexual assault policy. SAPRO collaborates with all of the military Services and their Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) programs to effectively manage the prevention of sexual assault and responses to assaults that occur. The name of each Service’s program differs slightly; for instance, the Army’s sexual assault prevention program is SHARP (Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention), whereas the Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force call their programs SAPR. In spite of the naming differences and varying mission statements, all of the offices share a common mission to prevent, educate, intervene, and provide resources should a military member experience sexual assault and, in some cases, sexual harassment. This section provides an overview of how the program as a whole is viewed across the Services in both CONUS and OCONUS locations. Specifically, perceptions of SAPR/SHARP, training, resources, and suggestions for improvement according to the interviewed Service members will be discussed.

General SAPR/SHARP Perceptions

Participants were asked about what comes to mind when they think of SAPR/SHARP. Overall, Service member participants knew what SAPR/SHARP is and its function. However, the perceptions of SAPR/SHARP were mixed when exploring how members felt about the program. Specifically, male participants fell into two groups: those who felt SAPR/SHARP is a worthwhile and effective program and those who felt frustrated and had less positive reviews.

Those participants who indicated feeling more positively about the SAPR/SHARP program viewed the program as effective for Service members who have been assaulted and need resources to help resolve their issue or at least provide further resources to the victim.

“When an individual comes in and says, ‘This is what happened to me.’ Then everybody snaps into the mode. It’s game day. This is what we practiced for. This is what we’ve been training for. And those individuals, that whole SAPR chain of command and the whole SAPR group there started implementing the process. I feel it’s effective.”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

As noted, other male participants viewed the program less positively. Some male participants indicated feeling confused about the program itself or did not have a clear understanding of where to locate the program office on their base or post.

“Before I went there the other day because we were supposed to go to our class, but we went around the building. I didn’t even know that area was

used, those buildings were used. I thought it was like some type of child care type stuff. Unless you went over there, read the doors or something, you really wouldn't know where it was."

– Air Force OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

Other Service members who participated said they thought the SAPR/SHARP program tries to accomplish too much. This applied generally to how much time members spend hearing about the program itself, as well as the role of the program overall. In a similar vein, participants reported feeling that the duties of prevention and response professionals should be their sole duty to allow for higher quality responses and trainings. They also reported feeling that there was too much going on in each role to have functions combined with regular military duties. For example, a Service member may serve as the Uniformed Victim Advocate (UVA) and work in a maintenance group as well as being assigned other duties while being required to complete a given number of volunteer hours separate from the duty as a UVA. Service member participants said they believed this watered down the quality of the SAPR program.

"I think part of it is with the military aspect of it, if they're in the UVA, they've also got their other job and then their other 40 different tasks that they're working with. They're not able to focus down. I don't know what all they had to do with everything when you're teaching those courses, but I assume you had a lot of other things that you had to do as well."

– Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Officer, Male

Additionally, Service members who participated indicated believing that SAPR/SHARP advocacy is one sided and viewed to favor the alleged victim over the alleged perpetrator. Some male participants reported believing that the program does not offer alleged perpetrators the benefit of the doubt, even before the completion of a formal investigation. Many participants indicated that they believed alleged perpetrators are not given an equal opportunity to be heard. Specifically, some participants said they thought incidents reported as sexual assaults were unfairly labeled, potentially contributing to the belief that female Service members make false accusations of sexual assault. A few male participants said they believed the process SAPR/SHARP uses may be biased against alleged perpetrators and, therefore, should be handled outside of the involved parties' unit or squadron. Participants reported that they thought that investigating an alleged sexual assault within the victim's and alleged perpetrator's unit may lead to unfair treatment against one person or the other due to reputation, work ethic, or any number of reasons. Participants stated that the incident should be independently investigated by people outside of their unit and both parties should be given due process.

"It seems like anytime there's an allegation made, the alleged victim is treated as a victim, and the alleged assailant is treated as an assailant. There's no due process. This person is treated like a victim, this person is treated like an assailant from word go."

– Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

“The legal, the OSI investigation, and that stuff all works. The problem is before that can happen; assailants are assailants, not alleged assailants. That’s the problem I have with it. So now if it comes back and it’s determined that OSI has not found enough evidence to support that it was actually a sexual assault or a rape versus a regretful night, if it comes back and it’s that, then it’s put on the unit.”

– **Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

Overall, however, many participants noted that the SAPR/SHARP programming is improving. Although some Service members who participated find SAPR/SHARP programming frustrating due to repeated trainings and the treatment of victims and perpetrators, they do believe it is getting better over time.

“I think it’s gotten better. I mean, everyone’s learning from every situation, so that’s why it’s evolving. It’s not just at a standstill. This is law. This won’t change, so it’s just like most of the other programs that we have. [The program] actually gets better because people are [getting better] and the word’s getting out.” – **Marine Corps OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“Does it have real-world productivity? It does because I guarantee you a unit that has a known SHARP allegation and a known SHARP punishment instantly cuts the [expletive]. You would never, ever, ever get 100% reports from anybody that feel like they’ve been molested, or anybody that feel like they’ve been assaulted, or anybody feel like they getting harassed. You would never get that. And that’s from the civilian side and on the military side. You will never get that. But when you ask me, ‘Has it been helpful?’ Yes.” – **Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

To summarize, perceptions of the SAPR/SHARP programming are mixed. There are some positive elements surrounding the program. Some participants indicated that they believed the program is useful for mitigating incidents as long as there are visible results and is continuing to improve. Other participants had a less favorable opinion of SAPR/SHARP. Outside of trying to do too much and the co-mingling of roles within the program, most criticism from the participants revolved around training and how it is executed. The following section will address various aspects of training, both positive and negative.

Training

Participants were asked a series of questions surrounding training, such as its effectiveness, the characterization of men and women in training, and how training is viewed by command and Service members. Overall, Service members in the sessions commented that the training is valuable the first time it is received, but repeated presentation of the same training is viewed as ineffective. Training fatigue was mentioned quite often in conjunction with the type of presentations themselves. For male participants, the length of the presentation is a factor that

affects how the presentation is received, as well as whether enough effort is given to convey messaging.

“I feel like there’s been more focus on training than I’ve seen, but as far as people getting the help that they need, I have no way to know if people are actually getting what they want out of it, even though there’s more training pushed out.” – Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

“You hear a lot of [Service members] that have had this training so many times in the past that they met the annual requirements for the training, so this is their fifth or sixth iteration of having sexual assault prevention and response training and it is redundant.”
– **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

“The PowerPoints are four hours long. You cover sexual assault, sexual harassment in 30 seconds. But it’s always right in the midst when everyone’s falling asleep. So they’re just like, ‘Sexual assault, don’t do it. Sexual harassment, don’t do it.’ You don’t really get a class on it. We should have a no-[expletive] sit down, like, ‘Hey, this is considered sexual harassment, and this is considered sexual assault.’ When we cover it in 30 seconds out of four hours, you don’t really drive the point into someone who is that 1%.”
– **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Training Success and Effectiveness

Service members in the focus groups were asked to give their opinion on the emphasis leadership places on sexual assault and sexual harassment training, as well as the effectiveness of training. Many male participants, varying in rank and location, indicated that they felt training is valuable and effective. Some participants indicated that training is effective in equipping younger Service men and women with the tools to intervene and create an awareness surrounding sexual assault and harassment. Awareness was seen as a necessary component in combating sexual assault and sexual harassment.

“I think for younger Airmen, there are a lot of good principles in there that I think they can learn how to actively intervene and not just be a bystander. Some of the principles in Green Dot are intervening, distracting, and just paying attention more. Certainly, those are very positive things. I think for certain populations, they need to hear it more than others. I think it maintains a level of awareness of sexual assault that is really good so I think that’s really good about it. I think it’s good for people to sort of have that awareness that ‘hey, this is an issue where we need to all be fighting against and working together.’” – Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male

Some participants reported believing that training was important because it informed potential victims of sexual assault and sexual harassment about resources such as the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC). The training was viewed by focus group members as not only educational by explaining to Service members who potential victims could talk to, but also informative on how to initiate the reporting process should it be necessary.

“Another thing that’s important to use for victims to know their recourse, to even know what’s out there to help them like the special victim advocate, the SARC, and the chaplain’s mental health and special victim’s—so I think it’s important for that to get out, too, so if someone does find themselves the victim that they know who they can go to for help.”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

Other male participants appreciated the approach of training, which provided examples and a procedure to follow should a Service member be put into a situation in which they have to intervene in a potential sexual assault or sexual harassment. Participants also acknowledged experiencing or knowing someone who has experienced sexual assault would increase how seriously training is taken.

“There were like four or five different vignettes. So the training is effective. Again, we identified the problem and these are the steps to get to the solution and everybody hears it. Obviously, we’re different and it’s taken at different levels of seriousness. Someone who’s been a subject of a sexual assault or someone who has a friend who was [sexually assaulted], they take it a little more seriously than someone who hasn’t. But the bottom line is the training’s sufficient. And the follow-up in responding to sexual harassment, I think that’s effective as well.”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

“I think they put enough information out there. [There are] signs that somebody’s going to maybe potentially get put into a situation. I do think they do a good job. The training does well in that regard of being able to identify a situation that could potentially lead to bad things.”

– **Air Force, CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

As discussed in the sessions, one of the major reasons members disliked training was because of its repetitiveness. However, other Service members who participated reported that they felt repeating the training was actually beneficial, as it gave Service members multiple chances to absorb the information presented as well as a chance to hear something they may have missed in previous sessions.

“Even for the people that don’t get it—for the people that do, sometimes you can just think of it as ‘Okay, they’re just reminding you what to look for. If

you see this, then you can prevent it.’ It gets a little repetitive being told that all the time, but at the same time, at least you never drop your guard when you hear it all the time. It’s like as soon as you see something, ‘Oh I heard that not too long ago. I hear it all the time.’ You see it and you can stop it. That’s the good side to it other than it just being really repetitive. But still, it keeps it fresh in your mind.”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Additionally, Service members in the sessions indicated believing that training allowed for process and procedure to be followed to assist victims when an assault has happened. Similar to being prepared to intervene, participants reported feeling that everyone knows how to handle the aftermath of an assault in a quick, productive, and professional way so as to minimize the trauma felt by the victim and others involved in the situation.

“Right there is a good definition of it, ‘Just doing the right thing when it happens.’ We’re not changing society. It’s going to continue to happen. We can try to limit it as much as possible, but when it does happen we follow the process to try to expedite it so that it’s not this long drawn out and it’s not good for anybody. And you continue on. And you don’t let it hold you back.”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

Training as a Mandatory Activity

Although many male Service members in the focus groups were satisfied with the current training, some male participants expressed feeling that the training is viewed as a mandatory activity and is not taken as seriously as it could or should be. More so, leadership’s involvement in implementing training was viewed as “checking a box” in order meet training goals and to be compliant with policy.

“It’s...a box check for your entry requirement. So, it’s a ‘we have to get this done’ or it’s really reactive. Something happened so now we need to talk about it again.”– **Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

Participants explained the method of delivery is often an indicator of how seriously the training is taken. In some cases, the training was read verbatim from the presentation or was not updated, which participants suggested this minimal effort invested in the training communicates to Service members that the training is not a priority. Further, facilitators also played a role in the way training was received. Participants indicated that when the facilitators do not respect the material in the appropriate way (e.g., joked while presenting the material), it sends a message that the training is not important to leadership or command.

“They just read straight from a paper. So, they were just talking dully, and just reading from a paper just standing there. It’s just not catching anyone’s

attention. It's not that we don't take it seriously. I don't know if they come from a place they heard it so much."

– **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

"I think for a lot of people, live presentation sometimes has a better impact on individuals than the online. Because online, it gets repetitive, and sometimes it takes over three or four years to even [update it]. It's like two Chiefs of Staff of the Army ago when you're pulling it up. So, to me, that sends a message in and of itself that it's really not that important that we can't get this on our senior leader's calendar to say, 'Hey sir, can we shoot you for a clip here, a clip there,' to send the message that, 'Hey, through the progressive transition of the senior leaders, it's still important."

– **Army OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

"It's the facilitators, when you hear it, it comes off as a joke like, 'Hey, don't touch anybody.' And then when they start joking about it, it does take away from that seriousness. So when you're writing it at the level of wherever it's coming from, the facilitators that are being chosen, I don't know if they're handling it with the appropriate amount of care, to where the rest of us are just like, 'Let's get through this two-hour block of whatever we have to do today.'" – Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

Although some Service members in the sessions reported that they believed “checking the box” occurred, others thought that most leaders and Service members do their best to get the most out of training and would try to be as effective as they could in preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment.

"It's a box that needs to be checked for them. They've got to be compliant, so they're pretty positive in encouraging that it gets done and that sounds kind of cynical, and it maybe is a little bit. But I will say that I do genuinely believe that all the leaders I've had, whether I think they were ineffective leaders in other ways, all of them truly believe that sexual assault, sexual harassment, is wrong and they truly believe that—and want it eliminated from our [Service] and from society. I don't think there's anything in their behavior or how they message it that detracts in any way."

– **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

Overall, sexual assault and sexual harassment training was viewed as a requirement to be met. However, sexual assault and sexual harassment was perceived to generally be taken seriously, and participants said they felt the behaviors of leadership do not detract from the seriousness of the issue.

Portrayal of Male Service Members in Training

Male Service members were asked in the focus groups about the treatment of men and women in training materials, such as men typically being framed as the alleged perpetrator and women being framed as the victim. Again, there were two types of participants who differed in their opinions on the matter: Some participants expressed that they felt the training did a good job of maintaining a balance when portraying men and women as victims or alleged perpetrators, and other participants indicated they felt males were unfairly portrayed as always being potential perpetrators.

“I think they’re doing the job of balancing it out because they’ll give different scenarios from females assaulting other females, male assaulting another male, and all interacting. I don’t think that’s the issue.”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“If you’re not paying attention and you just all of a sudden get back into it, or you’re just walking out from the outside, it kind of seems like it’s one-sided towards females. But most of us here are old enough to know that it’s across the board. But the young airmen that are coming in, it may seem like it’s just on that side, when it happens on both sides.”

– **Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

Some male participants took issue with women being treated as only victims in a sexual assault or sexual harassment situation because men can be victims too. Although they acknowledged men are more likely to commit an assault, they reported feeling that women could be potential perpetrators as well, and that training does not adequately convey this.

“I think the man is always the aggressor. The man is never the victim. And it’s always a younger man, someone with probably less than five years of experience. That’s always the standard mold.”

– **Army OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

“As far as training goes, the scenarios we see are more the interactions and actions of each individual, not necessarily male-on-female, but it could go either way. It’s like if a guy grabbed a guy’s arm, and he tried to leave, then he wouldn’t let go and he got all weird, the same thing. It could go either way. I don’t think it would be necessary to change scenarios or change things, but just make people more aware that it could be male-on-male or female-on-male.” – **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

SAPR/SHARP Resources

SAPR/SHARP programs provide assistance to Service members, covering a range of services when dealing with sexual assault and/or sexual harassment. Those services include how to report if one has been a victim of assault or knows someone who has been assaulted, and

strategies to prevent sexual assault. Other services include Uniformed Victim Advocates (UVA), Victims' Legal Counsel (VLC), and training and various websites addressing sexual assault. As part of the focus groups, participants were asked about their knowledge and use of resources provided by the SAPR/SHARP programs. Most of the male Service members in the groups were able to verbalize how to use, find, or access their various resources. However, there was a small group who indicated that they felt services were not necessarily as accessible as they could be.

Most male participants reported feeling that the SAPR/SHARP program is a valuable resource for Service members. They indicated the program offers a substantial amount of services, including physicians and legal counsel. Male focus group members also indicated that even though they have not personally accessed the services, they know where they could be located and believed the resources to be useful and a good source of information for Service members.

“SARC’s pretty heavy duty though. I mean, you got a full-time lawyer for that purpose, so I think that says a lot that that resource is there. Lawyers don’t come cheap.” – **Air Force CONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

“I can’t say a whole lot about them being a resource, but they definitely have a lot of good advice. Definitely good advice and good actions, good other resources as well that you can take, that you can go to get advice and training.” – **Navy CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Participants stated that properly trained Uniformed Victim Advocates (UVA) are a good resource to consult, and in some instances, UVAs are well known and easily available to Service members.

“I don’t know if it’s because of the rank of the UVAs because it’s usually they’re either officers or staff NCOs. Or I know a lot of them have talked to the chaplain and stuff just because that’s pretty widely known that you can talk to them about anything.”
– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

Some participants conveyed that some Service members were resistant to accessing services for reasons unknown to the participants. Responses in the focus groups sessions suggested that rank, knowing the SAPR/SHARP officer interpersonally, or being intimidated were all factors in whether a member would choose to seek services. Specifically, participants stated if a SAPR/SHARP resource was too high ranking, they did not feel comfortable discussing their problems and concerns with that individual. Therefore, these factors, among others, may prevent Service members from taking full advantage of the resources provided to them.

“I have met, through my wife, who’s friends with several young female Marines, met several young Marines that still for some reason feel intimidated to go a UVA or something like that and chose to disclose things to my wife, who’s just a civilian friend—I was like, ‘Why didn’t they go to the UVA and talk to them about this?’ So I don’t know. I think that there’s still

something being missed.”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement

Participants were asked to make recommendations or give suggestions for ways in which training could be improved. Training was viewed as necessary because of the diverse backgrounds of Service members. The participants noted three opportunities for improvements to training: the size of training session, differentiation of training content, and the person who facilitates the training.

Service members in the sessions indicated SAPR/SHARP training is often given in large group settings ranging from 100 to 350 people in a large auditorium. Often these trainings are PowerPoint presentations presented by a SAPR representative, an officer in the unit, or another Service member. Participants indicated the large size of trainings limited their effectiveness because Service members do not engage in trainings with such large audiences. Therefore, Service members in the focus groups suggested decreasing the group sizes for training to allow for adequate discussions of material and personalized attention.

“Definitely done in smaller groups and more participation oriented, less PowerPoint, so just less videos. Last month, we had to sit through a two and a half hour class of just videos with some speaking from the instructors, but it was all just videos. You kind of got lost in the moment. It’s got to be more participation oriented.” – **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

“I would say smaller group discussions because if we do the 335 people we have—it goes by too fast, and no one gets an opportunity to step in and voice their opinions here, where we’re in a small enough group that everyone’s opinions [have] been heard.” – **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Other male focus group members offered the suggestion to customize training based on rank or experience. More specifically, they suggested creating specialized content addressing the most relevant messages for a particular group. For example, younger members entering the military would need basic sexual assault and sexual harassment training on prevention strategies, situational awareness, definitions, and ways to intervene, whereas more senior Service members could focus on prevention, handling a member of their command reporting, and ways in which to handle their unit following an accusation or incident.

“[We should have] a 100, 200, 300, 400 approach where the baseline level, your lieutenants, your young airmen get all the same kind of, ‘Hey, don’t sexually assault people. Don’t rape anybody.’ And as you go to the 400 level, it would be more of, ‘All right, you’re a commander now. How do you respond to allegations?’ And then, find a couple of ways to do it in between. So you’re hearing the same message, but it’s a different spin on it every time

and more applicable to where you are in your career.”

– **Air Force CONUS Senior Officer, Male**

“I know you said something about the different ranks and all that. I know up in my shop, they started doing something new this year where they separated from E-4s and below have their one class, and then E-5s and above have a totally different one. I feel that that would be a lot easier, except there’s some staff sergeants that they’ve done this for so long where they’ve just stopped caring.” – **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Finally, across all Services, participants indicated the training presenter is very important and has a large effect on how the training is received. Service members in the sessions differed in their belief as to whether or not the presenter should be a civilian or Service member. Nevertheless, most agreed that the presenter should be engaging and have a very clear understanding of the audience, environment, and operations of the people they would be training. Participants indicated feeling that presenters should also be invested in the training and be able to provide thorough, well-thought-out information and be able to allow for slight deviations from approved content by the DoD when relevant to the environment.

“It’s amazing how the SHARP program is universal across the military. It is the same information. Yet different units have different respect for their SHARP program. The program’s the same. The slides [are] the same and all that. But it’s all about who that presenter is, and how they come off. And not only when they’re in that role, it’s also the time when they’re not giving SHARP training and how they communicate or talk to their environment.”

– **Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

Leadership

Previous work has demonstrated that leadership’s attitude toward sexual assault and sexual harassment exerts a powerful influence on the gender dynamics in organizations and work groups (e.g., Sadler et al., 2017; DMDC, 2016). In order to fully understand the climate around gender-related behaviors, it is important to explore the role of leadership in preventing and responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment. Below, we discuss how Service members in the focus groups defined leadership, who they see as leaders, and what constitutes constructive versus destructive leadership behavior. Subsequently, we discuss leaders’ roles in issues related to sexual assault and sexual harassment.

When asked to discuss who they viewed as leaders on the installation, male participants generally first mentioned those high in the traditional rank structure, such as commanders, generals, and admirals. However, they indicated that those with the most powerful influence on day-to-day culture and attitudes were the active duty Service members they interact with daily, such as supervisors or direct commanders. Although most of the participants at CONUS locations spoke positively about their local leadership and command, some participants at OCONUS installations described their leadership as “weak.”

Leading by Example

Participants were asked to provide a basic definition of leadership and what behaviors constitute leadership in their eyes. Leadership across the seven installations was perceived by participants to take many forms, including mentorship, friendship, and initiative. Most participants agreed on the key component of leadership as setting an example for both peers and younger Services members.

“I look to us as being leaders and setting examples for us, but also above us to lead and set out guidance and instruction that we can adhere to and to make sure that guys below us are adhering to those standards and carrying out. We’re not just talking the talk, we’re actually walking. We are being set up and setting those examples for them.”

– Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

“I think setting the example is a huge part of it, in both the things you do, the way you act and carry yourself. And just personally what kind of activities you engage in.” – Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

Peer Leadership

Although many active duty male Service members in the focus groups viewed “rank” as an indicator of leadership, most indicated that they felt their peer colleagues or local leadership had the biggest influence on the actual day-to-day life at the installation. Senior leadership at the command, direct supervisors, and Service members in junior positions who participated in the sessions, all agreed that their peers contributed the most to setting the tone in terms of installation culture and appropriate conduct.

“We know we are supposed to set the tone, and everybody above us knows that we are supposed to set the tone, and we try to line ourselves up to do that. But it’s the informal leaders who are down in the trenches day in and day out who are actually setting the tone.”

– Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

Women as Leaders

Some male participants expressed that the increase in female leadership on base has set a good example of proper conduct for all Service members. Specifically, participants noted that the visibility of women in leadership positions is important for changing the male-dominated culture in the military. Male participants emphasized the positive role women leaders play on the installation and did not discuss any negative consequences of female leadership.

“I’m seeing a lot of female leadership step up to address that culture problem and working with their male counterparts to show, ‘This is how we lead. You

are a sailor. We don't have to always be blinded by male/female."
 – Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Male

Leadership's Attitude Toward Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy

When asked how leadership promotes prevention of sexual assault and harassment on installations, there was a consensus from the focus groups that a “no tolerance” policy is in place. Many male participants also mentioned that the issues of harassment and assault were “very present” throughout the day-to-day life of active duty Service members, and most messaging around issues related to sexual harassment and sexual assault is disseminated through senior leadership. Although many participants were adamant about the strong stance on preventing and prosecuting sexual assaults, participants expressed mixed viewpoints about the implementation of the SAPR/SHARP training and policies. The SAPR/SHARP program will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Creating a Safe Environment

Some male active duty Service members who participated indicated that leadership is actively engaged in and supportive of prevention efforts at their installations. Creating an environment that encourages prevention and bystander intervention was a theme heard during the sessions across branches, rank, and location. Many senior enlisted and senior officer participants reported feeling that every individual in the military should have an active role in preventing assault and harassment, demonstrating leadership's message that sexual assault prevention is a responsibility that falls on all members. Senior enlisted and senior officer participants also focused on the importance of leader response to Service member concerns about sexual harassment or assault, underscoring the importance of creating an environment wherein Service members feel comfortable raising such concerns to leadership.

“It's not about what happens, but how you see it and how you prevent it. If sexual assault occurs, you don't want to be blaming the victim like, ‘[how] could you let this happen?’ Instead, provide support like, ‘if you need anything, I'm here for you.’” – Navy CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

“I think the important thing as leaders is creating an environment where if something happens, they know they can come forward and there's not going to be any repercussions.” – Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

When asked the role of officers and senior enlisted leaders at the installation, participants indicated feeling that these leaders need to be approachable, especially for issues related to sexual assault and harassment. Whether this means being kind, being a resource, or serving as a mentor, the participants indicated that they want to be able to rely on senior enlisted leaders.

“For senior enlisted leaders, when they're approachable, when you can talk to them about anything that's going on—and being honest like, ‘hey, what could I do if this kind of situation ever happens or if I end up in this

situation?’ ...Being the kind of mentors and being the outside of the box thinkers, if you will, that would be able to talk about issues with their peers, and subordinates.” –Navy CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

Fear and Discomfort. Alternatively, many senior members of leadership in the sessions expressed their hesitance to engage in prevention efforts when it comes to sexual assault policies and reporting due to their concern of being accused of misconduct, as well as the uncomfortable nature of the topic. This was most commonly heard in the focus groups from more senior leaders and those older in age, as compared to junior enlisted Service members.

“One of my duties is to be a person who is capable of receiving a sexual assault report. I know exactly what to do and who to call. I don’t want to receive it...And if I know other people don’t want to receive the report, am I going to be the one who gives it to them?”
– Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

Some male participants indicated that they and their male colleagues are uncomfortable managing women due to the increased attention to sexual assault in the military, and they fear that interacting with a female Service member would lead to an accusation of inappropriate gender-related behavior. Due to that fear, there was a sense from the participants that their female colleagues are affected negatively by these dynamics. In the sessions, males discussed that a consequence of the fear of accusations regarding inappropriate gender-related behavior is limited interactions between male and female Service members, which can be especially isolating for women.

“I had a civilian career before coming into the military and the first thing that shocked me is how uncomfortable male leadership is to manage females. And is to this day still.” –Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Male

“My assistant is a female. I’m breaking every rule from back home every time we go out. I’m never alone with a female. Never, at home, unless it’s my wife. And here, I have no choice. I’m in a position I don’t like at all and that’s personal... And is that fair? I don’t know. But it’s not fair when all that someone has to say is he said this or he did that and I have no defense. So, I’m going to make sure, to the best of my ability that I have a defense and everyone knows that this is the way it happens.”
–Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male

Training

When asked about leadership’s involvement in SAPR/SHARP programming, many Service members in the groups discussed leadership’s important role in participating in training. Many participants considered leadership’s level of enthusiasm with the SAPR/SHARP training to be a key indicator of its importance. Many Service members in the sessions indicated that lack of

leadership enthusiasm and involvement in training creates a negative culture surrounding attitudes of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

“The most important thing is just being [at training]. If everybody saw them there, it’s clear it’s important.” – Navy CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

“If the leader is completely apathetic and counting down the days, and breeze through the class, then you probably have a bad culture.”
– Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male

When asked what leaders do at their installations to prevent sexual assault or harassment, some male participants detailed actions or remarks from some leaders that undercut the military’s efforts to prevent sexual assault. The general consensus among male Service members in the focus groups was that some in senior leadership exhibit a flippant attitude toward SAPR/SHARP training. Many participants attributed this to the high volume of training and requirements for the program. That is, given that Service members receive such a high volume of trainings, any single training on its own is not perceived as particularly important.

“They don’t take [training] seriously. Your squad leader or commander’s like, ‘Ah, whatever its only SHARP training.’ It takes away that aspect or the importance of the program.” – Army OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

“I think comments like, ‘We’ve got to show the stupid video, so watch the dumb video then sign your name on the roster and leave,’ is how training is portrayed.” – Army OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

“During the training, or afterwards, we joke about the video. ‘Oh, the video was corny, that never happens.’” – Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

General Perceptions of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Participants were asked about a wide range of topics about sexual assault and sexual harassment at their installation and in their Service. Topics of interest included general perception and understanding of sexual assault and sexual harassment, the form both behaviors can take, gender differences in both behaviors, situations in which people are at risk for sexual assault or sexual harassment, and prevention.

Defining Sexual Assault

Male Service member participants appeared to feel confident in their grasp of what constitutes sexual assault. Most participants indicated a situation escalates to sexual assault (from lower level unwanted behaviors) when unwanted physical contact is initiated. Focus group participants expressed that sexual assault is comprised of a range of behaviors such as exposing private body parts, touching private body parts, attempted rape, and rape. Service members in the sessions indicated they felt that sexual assault is a fairly clear cut and easily discernible event.

“Sexual assault means I’m physically touching somebody in a sexual manner and it is inappropriate.” – Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

Defining Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment was less clearly conceptualized for Service member participants. There was uncertainty when participants tried to define and discuss behaviors that constitute sexual harassment. Many male Service members in the focus groups indicated that they believed that since sexual harassment is open to interpretation, some alleged perpetrators may be unaware they are sexually harassing someone.

“I think if people were presenting... scenarios, and then ask the question, ‘Is that a sexual assault or not?’ Most of them would be able to identify it as that is or that is not sexual assault. I think the gray area is going to be sexual harassment.” – Navy CONUS Senior Officer, Male

“You know what your own intentions are anyways and it may be innocent, but you don’t realize that you’re seriously causing drama next to you because you know this stuff isn’t what you intended to do. Again, you can’t take a step back and drive in that chase view where you’re looking at your own car and realizing what you’re doing. That’s probably not realizing the way other people perceive it.” – Navy CONUS Junior Officer, Male

Focus group participants expressed that what constitutes sexual harassment is a matter of intensity of the behavior, personal opinion, and background. In other words, what may be perceived as sexual harassment to one person may not be to another Service member. Participants indicated that their familiarity with the people with whom they interact is also a factor in whether a behavior is considered sexual harassment.

“Well, you got people from different states, different walks of life, and in rare instances different countries. And what they might see as cool because they’re in their unit. They’re all buddy-buddy, right, they are family. Or it might be in a relationship with one another. That’s just PDA. But you got some other people over there sitting on a stool or fold out chair, all grouchy at the world. He sees the same thing and he’s says, ‘These are bad,’ and starts reporting it. Then, you have certain individuals that do things. They move around. They might get the wrong impression of what’s going on, too. They make it seem like any physical contact, like a back pat, is sexual assault. Some people it would be. To some people that’s just camaraderie. There are some gray areas.” – Army OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

Forms of Sexual Harassment. The majority of male Service member participants discussed various types of situations that could be interpreted as sexual harassment, such as overhearing a

conversation or making inappropriate jokes. In addition, male Service member participants agreed that causal conversations among Service members may seem harmless or participants in those conversations are “just goofing around,” and therefore, do not realize that their language could be interpreted as sexual harassment by others. In general, male Service member participants were more likely to describe verbal forms of sexual harassment as opposed to gestures or other physical actions.

“Really, any comment that could be causing someone else offense, can be— however, somebody perceives something spoken because it can be in a group full of guys and girls, you’re talking about something, and somebody walks by. And one, they don’t even know what the conversation’s about. And two, they just overhear one piece of it. And all of a sudden, they’ve got this perceived idea of what you all are talking about, and then they go tell somebody.” –Navy CONUS Senior Enlisted, Male

“We joke about these things like it’s all nonchalant, like it’s not a big deal. Like sexual assault, rape, [EXPLETIVE], there’s so many jokes like that that goes around in our shops between our peers and stuff.”
–Marine Corps CONUS Junior Enlisted, Male

Male focus group participants agreed that the most common form of sexual harassment perpetrated by males consists of inappropriate games and comments that “got out of hand.” Many male Service member participants indicated that they have become desensitized to gender-related issues and see these inappropriate behaviors as a way of socializing.

“For girls, maybe it’s a little bit different, where yeah, that was an inappropriate touch. But if a guy is drinking with his buddies a lot, I’ve heard several times where they’ll say, ‘Oh, just don’t pay any attention to him. He’s just drunk.’ Or, ‘He’s just drinking. He didn’t mean it.’ Whereas, the girl takes a little bit more offense. And the guys almost see it as an excuse or use it as an excuse. Whereas, the female would say, ‘No, it doesn’t matter if he’s drinking or not. It’s inappropriate touch.’”
–Air Force CONUS, Senior Officer, Male

Environment of Uncertainty

Due to the unclear understanding of what behaviors constitute sexual harassment, male participants indicated feeling that there is an environment of uncertainty, which affects the workplace and keeps Service members from forming bonds with their counterparts, especially female colleagues. Specifically, male Service member participants reported that they felt “at risk” when interacting with female counterparts. They indicated because boundaries of sexual harassment are not always well-defined they would rather not “risk it” and unintentionally offend

a female co-worker, therefore, they simply do not engage with female counterparts. Because of this belief, unit cohesiveness can be compromised and close-unit bonds may not be formed.

“It’s very hesitant because you never know. You don’t know what she might go and say. You just don’t know. And it’s better to not even say anything like that because there are a lot of times where I’ve seen people saying derogatory things or comments, and then all of a sudden, they’re in sergeant major’s office. So, it’s just like you just don’t know.”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

“I feel like I’m so locked up now that I can’t be real with the people I spend the majority of my time with more than my family. But for the most part that’s the biggest issue when it comes to sexual harassment, is the things you say and how they’re interpreted. I think most people are rather wise to not touching people or whatnot.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

Handling Harassment at the Lowest Level. Participants found the lack of clarity around sexual harassment definitions frustrating. Most Service member participants indicated they would rather be made aware that they had offended someone and self-correct than face disciplinary measures or leadership involvement. Most often, participants reported feeling that offenses are unintentional mistakes, and they would like the chance to work it out at the lowest level (i.e., Service member to Service member without escalating the issue to leadership).

“Someone says ‘Hey that offended me’ then you say ‘Hey, I’m sorry.’ That should be a way that we should be able to handle things.... You don’t know what base people are, and you don’t know how they’re going to be offended by things. You don’t know how they’re going to interpret things. And it becomes a real hard mess to deal with when the easy concept is, if you do offend someone, you should be able to say, ‘I’m sorry.’ And they should be able to accept your apology and not make it a national incident.”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

Gender Differences on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment. Male Service member participants indicated believing their female counterparts are more sensitive to behaviors. Specifically, they reported feeling that female Service members are not as permissive as males when it comes to crude jokes and are more likely to perceive them as inappropriate. However, some argued that there are no differences between gender on perceptions of what constitutes sexual assault and sexual harassment; these male Service members reported that they believed perceptions about behaviors depend on the individual, independent of gender.

Additionally, participants voiced that male Service members are less likely to report incidents of sexual assault or sexual harassment. We will discuss reporting in more detail later in the chapter.

Male Service members in the sessions also indicated a perceived double standard between male and female Service members with respect to consequences for engaging in sexual harassment,

believing that female Service members get away with saying things their male counterparts cannot. This perceived inequality is exacerbated by a perception that female Service members also receive special protections, such as having a code to get into their bathrooms.

Most male participants stated that female Service members are more empathetic and supportive of each other when it comes to sexual assault, as they can see themselves in the victim's situation, whereas this type of perspective-taking is perceived as more difficult for male Service members to achieve with their male counterparts.

Male Victims. Participants indicated that male Service members are less likely to report sexual assault and/or sexual harassment due to the social stigmas pertaining to a threatened masculinity. They expressed that they believed these types of situations should not happen to them and if they were to occur, they would not want their colleagues to know they were unable to defend themselves. In addition, male participants gave various examples of sexual assault and/or sexual harassment against male Service members and felt that the majority of sexual assault cases with male victims are male on male. Male participants also voiced that if the perpetrator of a sexual assault were female, male Service members would be unlikely to recognize or acknowledge this behavior as assault.

“The guy is supposed to be strong. The girl is supposed to be a little bit weaker. So you know this would happen. When a guy and a girl is together, you don't want to yield to the idea of this man just powerhoused you or something like that and something just happened. You don't even want anybody to think about that ever or that you can't defend yourself at all. So, you will never say anything just to save face or whatever. And so that will never happen. People will not report those things.”

–Navy OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

“Yeah, the aggressor, because there are definitely male victims out there. There are plenty of them; just like I recently saw in some of these numbers, but in most all these that I heard of, it was a male aggressor, too, so it was a guy-on-guy type of thing.”

– Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male

“Now, if I'm in an encounter with a female and she's saying, 'Let's have sex. Let's have sex,' and I say, 'No, I don't really want to. I don't really want to.' And somehow she convinces me, it's probably not that big of a deal to another male. It's not a big deal. Is it technically rape? Sure. Unwanted advances over and over again, persistence, yadda, yadda, yadda, and then finally convince me to have sex. That's probably rape. Does a male care that much? Honestly, 90% of the time, 95% of the time, no. So, I'm not going to report that.” – **Army OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

Risky Situations. The majority of male Service members in the focus groups said potential risky situations that could lead to sexual assault and/or sexual harassment included going off base at night (e.g., to a bar), walking in dark areas around the base, and going outside to use the showers and bathrooms.

“So, you have to go outside to be able to shower, and driving back and forth to showers, you don’t have bunkers back home when you’re walking. A lot of PT at different times. Lot more company-level PT back home than I see here, so people are walking and running at different times. So, the vulnerability, it’s probably greater on Camp Buehring than it would be on a post somewhere just because I’m not in my car, I’m walking. So, the fact that it is quiet here and quieter here probably has a lot more to do with there’s no alcohol here, or limited alcohol [laughter].”

–Army OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male

Alcohol and Consent. Across the installations, male Service member participants reported that determining sexual consent is difficult or a “gray area” if both parties have been drinking. Several participants concurred that alcohol is a prevalent factor in cases of sexual assault. Alcohol use is viewed as lowering a person’s inhibitions as well as impairing judgment and decision-making abilities, making people susceptible to either perpetrating or becoming victims of sexual assault. Furthermore, male Service member participants reported believing that some individuals who commit sexual assault or sexual harassment use alcohol as an excuse for their aggressive behaviors. Few male Service members discussed receiving training (e.g., hypothetical situations about drinking, bystander intervention) on alcohol use and sexual consent.

“I feel like it’s hard to tell when both parties have been drinking. Because some people can drink way more and be fine, then some people have one shot and they’re falling over. So it’s hard to tell. So when is consent? Is it as soon as alcohol touches the person’s mouth, is consent out the window or—so it’s just hard for them to gauge.”

–Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

“It is true statistically, a majority of sexual assaults there is alcohol or drugs. In the military, it’s into the alcohol more than anything involved. One thing I would say is we know though that perpetrators of sexual assault often will use alcohol to be able to perpetrate, and so it’s not always just, ‘Oh, two people getting drunk and then not realizing what they’re doing.’ Sometimes it is perpetrators intentionally using alcohol to subdue. It’s like snake venom.” – Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male

Prevention of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment. Male participants reported believing that regardless of the amount of training received, it is too difficult to change a person who

inherently is prone to commit unwanted behaviors. Some male participants acknowledged there may be a subgroup of individuals who will perpetrate regardless of the training they receive.

“I think what you brought up earlier about as far as the consequence on it, I think that should be more of a focus because, I don’t want to beat a dead horse about it, but people who assault, harassment, or whatever the case may be, male–female, male–male, whatever the case may be, if that’s in them, that’s in them. I mean, there’s nothing we can do at this point. That’s already embedded, whether it started young or at some point in their life.”

–Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

Bystander Intervention

Male Service members were asked about their perceptions of bystander intervention as a means of preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment, including the role of leadership in encouraging bystander intervention, attitudes toward those who intervene, and barriers to stepping in to stop an at-risk situation from escalating.

General Perceptions of Bystander Intervention

In general, male participants expressed a positive view of bystander intervention and said it is a key to prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment. They said they thought military leadership has an important role in emphasizing the importance of bystander intervention and that much is already being done by leaders to support this behavior. They also said they thought fellow Service members who intervene would be well received, and in many situations, Service members would intervene. However, participants also cited various barriers to intervening, highlighting the importance of continued attention on this issue.

Leadership’s Role

Male participants said that it is important for those in leadership positions to talk about bystander intervention, to focus on it during training, and to model behaviors consistent with bystander intervention in their everyday interactions. Junior male Service members in the sessions said they look to their leaders to demonstrate the values they, in turn, strive to uphold in their daily lives.

“Be enthusiastic about the trainings. Like we said earlier, it’s not about what you’re being taught. It’s how you’re being taught it.”

– Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

“I think it goes back to that small unit training...Not formal training but in that kind of small unit, leader development, and small unit kind of team building...[for example] just incorporating those issues into that space.

‘Hey, this is how you should behave and this is how you’re supposed to be taking care of your teammates.’” – Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Male

In general, male participants asserted that they are encouraged to intervene and those who do so are praised for their actions. They said the amount of support and reinforcement of the importance of bystander intervention by leadership is key, as well as the character and mindset of their fellow Service members. Participants noted that when a behavior, such as bystander intervention, is rewarded by leadership, the attitude toward that behavior naturally becomes more positive.

“If [a Service member’s peers] see him getting rewarded and reaping the benefits of that kind of positive behavior, they’re going to jump on board.”
– Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Male

Types of People Who Intervene and Strategies for Intervening

A number of male focus group participants talked about inherent qualities, like a person’s moral code and personality, as being important predictors of who would be likely to intervene in an at-risk situation. Participants said most Service members would feel comfortable intervening and that there are certain types of people who will always look out for their fellow colleagues, whereas others may look the other way or not want to interfere unless they are friends with those at risk.

“You’re going to have your normal outliers that think, ‘Leave me alone.’ But I think [the] general majority, I probably would say are comfortable [stepping in].” – Air Force CONUS, Senior Officer, Male

“In my opinion, [you should intervene whenever possible]. I have these moral standards, and regardless of whether or not I get in trouble, as long as I follow those moral standards...at least I can go to sleep at night knowing that I made an effort to try.”
– Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

Similarly, participants noted that there are a number of approaches to intervening. They suggested some Service members may be more bold and direct (e.g., explicitly telling the aggressor to stop), whereas others may take a more subtle approach to intervening (e.g., gently questioning whether everything is alright). Further, some participants posited that Service members vary in their willingness to escalate the situation to leadership; while some may proceed with reporting the incident to command, others attempt to resolve the situation without leadership involvement.

“I would want to handle it on my own...and I wouldn’t want to blow anything out of proportion. But at the same time...I would definitely want to prevent it before any stupid [expletive] happens...So instead of just going straight up to the chain of command, I would bring it up to the victim first like, ‘Hey, just a head’s up. Here’s what’s happening. Here’s what’s going on. Here’s what I suggest you should do, but it’s totally up to you.’”
– Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

“One of the things I started doing...was just walk by and address the person that looked like they were uncomfortable. I’m like, ‘You all right?’ And just see what happens there. And...then I’ll be a little bit more direct. And I’ll just come in like, ‘You guys good? You guys having a good time?’ And assess from there.” – **Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

In addition, participants indicated the way in which someone chooses to intervene can impact the way it is received by fellow Service members. For example, Service members are often looked upon more favorably when they intervene on a peer-to-peer level without escalating it to leadership unnecessarily.

“[If] I went to my peer and said, ‘Knock it off. Don’t do what you’re about to do because this is a bad choice.’...I think that is viewed much more favorably than the scenario where you’re not addressing it and the immediate issue or you’re not addressing it at your peer level. You’re just going up and telling a senior about it...Those are fundamental different things”
– **Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

Barriers to Intervening

Participants were asked about factors which might prevent Service members from intervening in a situation involving sexual assault and sexual harassment. They cited several potential obstacles, including backlash toward those who intervene, fear of getting others in trouble, discomfort getting involved with unknown persons or concern about misinterpreting complex circumstances, rank differential between the accused and bystander, uncertainty about whether a situation qualifies as sexual assault and sexual harassment, worry about getting in trouble for one’s own misconduct, and hesitation intervening when the victim is male.

Perceived Backlash Toward Those Who Intervene

Male members who participated indicated perceived potential negative consequences toward Service members who choose to intervene remain a barrier. They posited that when someone intervenes, they may be accused of ruining a good time or being a snitch and suffer social repercussions as a result. Moreover, participants indicated interveners may fear putting themselves at risk of a physical altercation and jeopardizing their own safety.

“I mean, situations where they seem like they’re both enjoying themselves, having a good time, and you don’t want to be a [expletive] block or hater to say, ‘Hey, you know what? Maybe you should back off.’...You don’t want to be that type of person to bring down the party, you know what I’m saying? Especially, when everybody’s having a good time right here, right now. I think that would deter people from interceding [to prevent] a sexual assault.”
– **Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“It’s just the fear of reprisal. If I step in and [say], ‘Hey man, that’s not cool,’ they’re going to be like, ‘All right. This guy’s...Joe Navy...he’s by the

book, and he's not someone we want to talk to...we don't want to be around him.'" – Navy CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

"If you snitch people are not going to [want] to get involved with you and [will] tell everybody." – Army OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

Fear of Getting Others in Trouble

Some male participants talked about a fear of getting fellow Service members in trouble as a potential barrier to intervening in cases of sexual assault and sexual harassment. They reported believing that if they are friendly with the alleged perpetrator, they may not want to get involved out of loyalty to the friend, particularly if they do not feel confident about the circumstances and whether a behavior is unwanted.

"Any intervention could very well mean that you have at least one person...[whose] career won't be the same afterward...those are the stakes with this kind of thing. So, I could certainly imagine that in many situations that could [cause people to say], 'I'm not sure what I just saw.' Or 'I want to make sure.' So you might get some hesitation where someone might be less likely to intervene."

– Navy OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male

"There [are] these other social psychological things going on where if it's your friend that you think is crossing the line, maybe you don't intervene. I actually just had a good friend of mine tell me that he intervened, and on a very clear situation when...a female was going to be taken advantage of. And the alleged perpetrator, all his friends came to his rescue and said, 'Are you [expletive] blocking my friend?'...So, they all should be doing the intervening as well. But they are going to protect their friend...Like, 'I got you, man. I got your back in all situations, even when it's wrong.'"

– Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male

Discomfort Getting Involved in Complex Situations

Some male Service members in the focus groups said that they feel uncomfortable getting involved in what they deem to be someone else's business, especially when confounding circumstances make it challenging for them to ascertain the seriousness of the situation. Potentially risky situations can be difficult to read when a Service member doesn't know the people involved. Alternately, if they are friends with those involved, they indicated they may have difficulty being unbiased and recognizing an at-risk situation. Likewise, the observer may find the circumstances difficult to interpret if the parties involved have a preexisting romantic relationship. Participants said that it takes a certain amount of moral courage to step in, particularly because they feel a majority of cases aren't clear when it comes to interpreting whether there is a risk of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

“They don’t want to get involved because maybe they know the people or they don’t want to seem lame or something. Or they don’t know the people, [and] they don’t know if it’s unwanted...I’ve had somebody get mad at me because I left them alone with somebody who was drunk. And I didn’t know because I had just met that person, so I didn’t know what to do.”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

“Two factors from my observation [can prevent someone from intervening]. They either know both individuals involved and they don’t want to risk a friendship or relationship with either of them, or they’re purely just not comfortable intervening in the situation.”

– **Army OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Rank Differential Between Bystander and Accused

Male participants said that if the alleged perpetrator is of a higher rank than the bystander, the bystander may be less likely to intervene to stop the situation. Because of the military rank structure and power differential between ranks, participants indicated Service members may feel like they won’t be heard if they accuse someone of a higher rank, or alternatively, they may be concerned about negative repercussions either socially or to their career advancement. Likewise, they may be less likely to see a threat with someone in a higher ranking position because they are conditioned to trust and look up to that person.

“They throw in scenarios where there’s a captain, or a colonel, or a general sitting there hitting on this young senior airman, and it’s like, ‘I’ve got a full bird colonel sitting there. How am I, as a tech sergeant, going to approach him to tell him to stop when somebody that high up in the food chain can adversely affect my career?’” – **Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“I think that when it comes to the bystander intervention...another thing that could be a hurdle is if a junior sailor sees a senior doing something wrong...because that junior might be thinking, ‘Hey, oh, man. If I say something, this is the person who writes my eval[uation]. This is the person who can affect my income as far as how I have to take care of my family.’”

– **Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

Fear of Punishment for Misconduct

Some male participants said that a fear of being punished for a secondary offense they were committing while being a bystander (e.g., underage drinking, fraternization) might prevent them from stepping in if they observe a risky situation. This creates a moral dilemma according to participants because Service members want to help their peers but struggle with the potential consequences of intervening and launching an investigation, which could reveal their own misconduct.

“I know there are people out there that’d be scared of the consequences [of their misconduct] and that probably wouldn’t step in [to prevent sexual assault].” – Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

Male Victims

Male Service members in the focus groups were mixed in their perceptions of how they would intervene if the potential victim of sexual assault and sexual harassment were a male. Some said they would react the same way no matter who the victim and assailant were in a given scenario; others said if the situation involved harassment rather than assault they might assume the male Service member is not in immediate danger and would not get involved. Likewise, some male participants said they believed there is a potential double standard when male victims are concerned, such that Service members may be less likely to intervene in a situation with a male victim and female perpetrator because they feel the male can handle himself and would not need the help of others.

“Say we’re out at a bar, right? And some chick’s just all over him and he’s clearly trying to get this woman to stop. I’m not going to be like, ‘It’s a woman, dude. Don’t be a wuss. You can handle this.’ ...[I’m] going to be like, ‘Clearly, he is not having fun here. He needs some kind of help.’”
– Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Male

“I would definitely handle [harassment] differently...It makes me feel uncomfortable if a male is [harassing] a female and vice versa. [But] obviously, this male can handle [himself] and remove himself from the situation more easily.” – Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Male

Sexual Harassment-Specific Barriers

Male Service members in the sessions stated that there are challenges specific to sexual harassment that make it less likely that fellow Service members may intervene in these situations. First, they said that sexual harassment is as a minor offense that happens frequently and is not worth reporting. Further, many male participants argued sexual harassment is in the eye of the beholder, and as such, can be difficult to interpret as a bystander, leading few Service members to feel comfortable intervening in these situations.

“Sexual harassment is the perception of the victim, right? And if you’re not the victim, then you’re guessing what they perceive. By making an assumption on what they perceive...that’s hard to justify if it’s not absolute. I don’t think anyone has a problem stopping what they know is absolute.”
– Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Male

“Now harassment’s a little different because someone’s like, ‘That’s just a joke, no harm, no foul...It’s not that bad. It’s common. I’m not going to say anything.’” – Army OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

“I feel like sexual harassment, it’s up to the person that’s being harassed to report it. Because you never know. Unless you work with the people every day and it’s somebody you work with every day, and you can tell that they don’t like it, it’s bothering them, I don’t feel like there’s any other way you could stop it.” – Army OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

Reporting

Male Service members in the focus groups were asked about their general perceptions of reporting incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment, including attitudes toward people who report, perceived gender differences as they relate to reporting, and their perceptions of the investigation and reporting process. They were also asked to discuss retaliation and potential barriers to reporting, whether social or professional.

General Perceptions of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Reporting

In general, male Service member participants said that they felt the military provided a supportive environment for reporting allegations of sexual assault and sexual harassment, and leadership on base encouraged such reporting. However, male Service member participants were split in terms of whether they felt comfortable reporting or would espouse a positive attitude toward a fellow Service member who reported allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment, with junior ranking Service member participants viewing reporting more negatively than senior ranking Service members. However, when discussing how junior Service members’ attitudes have changed over time, senior Service member participants indicated that they believed junior members are more accepting of reporting now than in the past. Male participants also highlighted some key distinctions in how men and women perceive sexual assault and sexual harassment, which might lead to differences in reporting. Finally, participants reported feeling that the investigation and reporting processes for sexual assault and sexual harassment are generally good, but they identified systemic practices that could lead to unfair treatment of the victim or the alleged perpetrator and deter some people from reporting.

Attitudes Toward People Who Report

Male Service member participants described a trend in which junior enlisted Service members were less likely to view reporting positively versus senior enlisted Service members and junior officers. Senior officer participants were most likely to view the reporting process in a positive light and to want to support fellow Service members who report. This tendency may be due to additional experience, responsibility, and education that come with being in a leadership role, which can make senior Service members more knowledgeable about sexual assault and sexual harassment issues and feel more accountable to fellow Service members. Junior Service member participants were more likely to talk about someone who reports sexual assault or sexual harassment in negative terms, using terms such as “snitch.” Junior Service members in the sessions were also more likely to talk about supporting people who report sexual assault or sexual harassment only when the charge is perceived to be indisputable. These participants also questioned the reliability of the accuser, highlighting that there must be hard proof that the accused is guilty for the report to be worthwhile and for the accuser to be believed.

“In general, I think it’s encouraged to report sexual assault if it occurs, yeah. Now, among peers, I don’t know if some peers may feel that way. They may feel that there are certain people that are just trying to get people in trouble. But from leadership perspective, I think it’s always encouraged to report sexual assault.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

“She was being harassed by him...Even though we all loved our Sergeant, she had proof and it was a real thing and nobody looked down on her for it. Everybody was, ‘Yeah, that’s [EXPLICIT] up,’ and he got kicked out of the Army and she got to leave the duty station.”
– **Army OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Gender Differences in Reporting

Male focus group participants talked about a number of themes regarding gender differences in perceptions of sexual assault and sexual harassment that might also lead to differences in reporting. Participants said male Service members are more likely to grow up joking around with other males, and sometimes continue that banter, which can include sexual comments, in the male-dominated military environment. As a result, they may be less likely to be offended by comments or jokes they hear while not realizing those same comments might be offensive to their female counterparts. So too, if they are harassed or assaulted, their first instinct might be to sweep it under the rug, either because they do not feel emotionally equipped to deal with it, or because they are concerned they may be perceived as less “manly” if they report it.

“Men don’t really dwell on these things...[it’s] not something we ruminate on...[we] handle it or just absorb it.”
– **Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“I think a lot of it has to do with masculinity and embarrassment and what will your friends think?...And what does my family think?...Would I still be able to be the same man I was once before I came over here?”
– **Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

Reporting and Investigation Process

For the most part, male Service members in the focus groups agreed that training regarding reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment is sufficient, resources are accessible, and overall, the process itself is fairly simple. However, participants reported that they believed it to be problematic that someone who reports can be punished for any misconduct they were engaged in at the time of the event. Participants said they believed such collateral punishment is unfair to the person reporting, since in effect, it penalizes them for coming forward and can have the unintended consequence of deterring Service members from reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment they observe or experience.

“I’ve seen where a friend...was off base and he witnessed sexual assault. And when he got back on base...he told what happened and [he] ended up getting a DUI because he was drinking...So maybe next time...[he] won’t say anything.” – Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Male

Regarding the investigation process, some male Service member participants said that it is biased in favor of the accuser, usually a woman. Participants claimed that the accuser receives support, privacy, and protection, whereas the accused does not. Moreover, they asserted that it is assumed that the accused is guilty, and as a result that person can lose their reputation, friends, work assignments, etc. Further, participants said potential damage to the accused’s reputation is long lasting and persists regardless of the outcome of an investigation.

“You’re treating the victim with kid gloves, and they get every resource known to man. So it’s almost like the weights have been skewed in one direction instantly. And that seems not in accordance with the Constitution. It seems like people are guilty until proven innocent.”

– Marine Corps CONUS, Senior Officer, Male

“I don’t think we protect the...alleged perpetrator enough. I think we put all the blame on that person, and we potentially ruin that reputation piece. Again, they’re innocent until proven guilty. I don’t know why, when it comes to sexual assault or harassment, we don’t believe in that. We throw it out the window...we’re not giving these people their due diligence or justice.”

– Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

Other male participants criticized the length of the investigation process. Participants stated that the investigation can take many months, which they argued can have negative repercussions for both the accuser and accused. Dragging out the process for so long means victims must continually relive the event, as they are interviewed on multiple occasions. For those accused, the lengthy investigation means more time that they must put their lives on hold and endure negative judgment in the eyes of their peers.

“I’ve seen some cases that took so long to adjudicate. The victim had gone through their counseling, and they were back on a better path as an individual, as a professional Marine. And now it came time for more interviews. It came time for the court-martial, and they said, ‘I’m tapping out. I talked to you guys about this four times. You have my statements. I don’t want to talk about it anymore.’”

– Marine Corps CONUS, Senior Officer, Male

“As long as they’re under investigation, they’re not going to promote. And [investigations] take a long time.”

– Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

False Reporting

There were a large number of male participants who were under the impression that false reporting of sexual assault and sexual harassment occurs frequently. This perception was fairly universal across rank and Service, although it was somewhat more likely to be endorsed among junior enlisted Service members. In general, the narrative provided was that false reporting of sexual assault and sexual harassment occurs because female Service members want to get reassigned to a different location, they want to retaliate against someone they believe hurt them, or because they regret a consensual sexual encounter. When asked how they know false reporting occurs, male Service member participants cited the high number of cases of sexual assault or sexual harassment for which charges were dropped due to lack of evidence or the accused was not convicted of the original charges in the reported allegation. These participants assumed that if someone is not charged with or convicted of a crime, the original report was false. Such accounts, similar in nature and typically describing a situation that happened to friend rather than a firsthand report, were brought up as proof of the frequency of false reporting. These same participants lamented the lack of consequences for making a false report and attributed it as another example of the way in which the reporting and investigation process is biased in favor of the accuser. Senior enlisted member and officer participants were more likely to suggest that false reporting is rare and recognized it is important to educate junior Service members on the realities of the reporting and investigation process.

“A lot of women, not that I’d say that they’re bad people or anything, but in military, they [want an] assignment out of here. I...see it all the time. They just blame somebody and then they get an assignment out here.”

– **Air Force CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

“There’s girls...maybe one of them gets to like me and we hit it off. Next thing you know, we’re in my room by ourselves in my bed...And her husband, because she has a breakdown, decides to say, ‘Hey, what happened?’ ‘Oh, this guy assaulted me in his room. He raped me.’ That’s it. I’m done...Public execution.”

– **Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

“It’s not right. It’s definitely one of the most spiteful things someone can do just to get someone in trouble. And, I definitely think there should be more repercussions for the person that made the false report because...it could ruin—that person who the report’s being made against—it could ruin their life, potentially ruin their career in the Marine Corps.”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Male Barriers to Reporting

Participants were asked about factors that might prevent fellow Service members from reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment. Some participants indicated feeling that such incidents were underreported. They cited several potential obstacles that might prevent people from reporting, including complex circumstances, fear of getting others in trouble, the length of the

investigation process, lack of privacy associated with the investigation, fear of social retribution or professional reprisal, rank of the alleged perpetrator, issues around being a male victim, and sexual harassment-specific barriers.

Complex Circumstances

Some male Service member participants talked about confounding circumstances and situations that are difficult to interpret as being potential barriers to reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment. They referred to situations in which one or both of the persons involved have been consuming alcohol and said that the presence of alcohol can make the line of consent for sexual contact “fuzzy.” Therefore, victims of sexual assault may be particularly reticent to report these incidents, either because they are unsure whether they gave consent or because they feel that they are partly to blame for putting themselves in a vulnerable position. So too, if the victim was involved in a prior relationship with the assailant, he or she might feel that they are unable to refuse harassing behavior or unwanted sexual contact because they had consented to similar acts in the past.

“The problem could be [that] with some victims, in their mind they may not be sure if it was clear assault or not because there may have been alcohol involved or there may have been [another] gray area...that could be factor why they’re hesitant to report.”

– Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male

Fear of Getting Others in Trouble

It was mentioned by a few male participants that a victim of sexual assault or sexual harassment might hesitate to report because the event in question might be relatively minor in their eyes, and they do not want to have a negative impact on the life and career of a fellow Service member. Participants reported that they felt anyone who is harassed or assaulted faces a decision in which they must weigh the consequences of moving forward with a report, particularly an unrestricted report which launches a formal investigation and can lead to life-long repercussions for the accused and the witnesses who could implicate themselves for collateral misconduct by testifying.

“Maybe the person who had this done to them [doesn’t] want to see the person they’re accusing get in trouble...something in their head was like, ‘You know what? I know what they did was wrong, but I don’t want to end their career, maybe they got a family or children, I don’t want that to get out to them, so I’m just going to take this with me and hold it in.’”

– Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

“I think the issue is, I don’t know if this thing that happened to me is a big enough deal to go talk to somebody about...This thing happened, made me uncomfortable, but I really don’t want to get anybody in trouble, so I’m not going to say anything.” – Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

Investigation Process

When asked about barriers to reporting sexual assault, some male Service member participants mentioned they believed the investigation process to be overly burdensome and potentially exposes members to an invasion of privacy, making perceptions about the process itself an obstacle to reporting.

Arduous Process. Focus group participants indicated that the investigation process for reports of sexual assault is extremely lengthy and time intensive, requiring multiple interviews from the victim, the accused, and any witnesses to the incident. Each stage of the investigation can take many months and those involved must put their lives “on hold” for the duration of the process. Service member participants stated that victims may be less likely to report because they perceive the process as long and painful. Others also noted that victims might feel the accused will be not be convicted and, at best, will receive a minor punishment for a lesser crime.

“The adjudication process for SAPR is really broken... That person’s waiting for two, two and a half years while the Navy process, NCIS specifically, wasn’t beefed up enough to handle what they were given. So that’s SAPR in a nutshell.” – Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Male

“I think we need to look at... putting more funding into adjudicating these things faster because the time delay, four or five months, just to get through the investigation of whether there is enough proof or evidence to do something. That’s pretty standard.”

– Air Force CONUS, Senior Officer, Male

“So if you’re a female that just got assaulted and you know maybe one in a hundred that you’re going to relive this 50 times at least, lawyers, the attorneys for, the attorneys against. Why would you put yourself through that? You’re not even going to get a conviction anyway. This cat’s going to get off Scott free.” – Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

Lack of Privacy. Some male Service member participants reported the lack of privacy inherent to the investigation process can deter people from reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment. This challenge regarding privacy is exacerbated by the often small military communities in which information travels fast via rumors. Participants indicated victims would not want their peers to know the details about what happened; they would be embarrassed and concerned people would not see them the same way and they would be forever associated with the incident. Further, there was a perception among some participants that when information about a report leaks, it usually consists of misinformation and Service members do not have the ability to defend themselves and correct this information with their peers. Participants indicated that members do not have control over what and how information is released, and therefore, they may feel powerless, particularly because they believe their careers and futures are at stake. Some also indicated that victims may not feel that those in charge of the reporting and investigation process have their best interests at heart.

“I feel like there may be some...people that don’t want to report it because they’re afraid that, ‘If I report it, even if it’s a restricted report...people are going to find out what’s going on and I’m going to get judged for it.”

– **Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“It’s a very small active duty, regardless of what you possibly think. So without you telling me that you’re literally going to swoop me up and put me into protective custody and get me a new name and identity and slap me in a new unit as soon as I sing like a canary, I’m not going to say anything.”

– **Army OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Rank of Alleged Perpetrator

Male Service member participants said that if the alleged perpetrator in a case of sexual assault or sexual harassment is of a higher rank than the victim, the victim may be less likely to report. Because of the military rank structure and power differential between ranks, participants suggested that Service members might feel that their report would not be taken seriously if the accused were someone of a higher rank, because there is a perception that those of higher rank tend to band together and protect one another. Alternatively, they said they would be concerned about professional reprisal and negative consequences to their career advancement. However, some participants insisted the rank of the assailant is inconsequential and would not dissuade them or their peers from reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment. They asserted senior leaders must be held accountable for their actions, sometimes more so, to set a good example of behavior that they want others to emulate. These Service member participants stated that the key to ensuring lower ranking colleagues are heard is for them to report higher up in their chain of command, so the alleged perpetrator cannot use his or her relative power to pull strings and evade prosecution.

“I guess just because I’m the lowest ranking officer there is and if you had somebody O-5, O-4, or higher, you just start to question, ‘What authority do I have to say anything about said person?’ ...And you start going through your mind like, ‘If I say something I don’t want to be wrong about it,’ because of all the potential consequences going along with that...and it’s just your word against his. It’s damned if I do, damned if I don’t sort of thing.”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

“We have such a hierarchical structure in the military—I mean, what if it’s a supervisor that did it or your boss or something. In the military, the power structure is different than in the civilian world. It just is. I think it’s much more pronounced. The power differentials in the military are much more pronounced than in the average civilian job or environment. So I think that plays a role...we have rank...we have 80% males, right...so we’re a different population in a lot of ways.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

“If it’s a staff NCO, then you skip all the way up to where it needs to go. So if it’s a staff sergeant and you know that he’s slapping some girl’s [EXPLICIT] ...then you skip all the way up to gunny, or you skip all the way up to a master sergeant or someone....because if you tell a corporal or a sergeant, it’s going to end up getting lost. So, you want to skip and go above him so that way it’ll rain down.” – Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Male

Fear of Alleged Retaliation

Male focus group participants were asked about the barriers to reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment related to a fear of retaliation, either social or professional. Participants agreed that a fear of retaliation, which may discourage them from reporting, is a legitimate concern among Service members. According to these male Service members, social retaliation is most likely to occur in the form of either damage to someone’s reputation or social ostracism, and professional reprisal might include passing someone over for promotion, giving them an undesirable post, or rating them poorly on job performance.

Reputation. Male Service member participants perceived fear of damage to one’s reputation—either because they are seen as ratting others out or to blame for the event itself—can be a barrier to reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment. Participants further stated the stigma of simply being associated with an incident can impact their reputation and is a strong motivator against reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment. Specifically, members said they would not want to be the person everyone is talking about or judging, particularly because the community within each Service is cohesive, so reputation carries substantial weight and can follow someone for the length of his or her military career.

“Let’s say I was raped by two shipmates and...they faced charges of sexual assault and criminal charges and were removed from the service...I don’t think anybody would want to go to their command and everybody say, ‘Oh, you’re that guy that got raped by two guys on your last command.’ And they’ll be afraid of, ‘Okay, how is that going to change their perception of me?’...That’s just something I don’t want out there because it could become a topic of conversation or interest, or associated with me personally wherever I end up next. It can be very tough in a small community to relocate somewhere else where...even if they’re not ashamed of it or they don’t have any hang-ups there about it. They just don’t want it to be part of their history now.” – Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Male

“It’s the scarlet letter...Your name is attached with this issue. And everybody remembers, ‘Oh, you had to take a break from command because you were going through a rape case because you were assaulted by this other person,’ and it’s—we feel sorry for the individual, but they [are] basically, for lack of a better term, looked at like damaged goods to some extent.”
– Navy OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male

“The first thing that’s going to come out is, ‘Okay, how am I going to be looked at? Is this something that I need to put out there?’”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

Victim Blaming. Some male Service member participants shared views that suggested that “victim blaming,” or the belief that those who experienced sexual assault or sexual harassment were at fault and brought the experience upon themselves, might be a factor that can prevent Service members from reporting these incidents. Some indicated victim blaming is a specific form of damage to one’s reputation and can manifest in several ways, all aimed at ruining a Service member’s reputation in retaliation for reporting: a victim may be accused of false reporting, may be told that he or she is at fault for making themselves vulnerable or behaving in a way that led to the assault or harassment, or that the event is not serious enough to merit getting someone in trouble. Consistent with these themes, male focus group participants said that victim blaming is likely to occur when the victim has been drinking, the victim is seen as promiscuous, there is a prior relationship between the purported victim and assailant, or they have made prior accusations of sexual misconduct. Of note, participants addressed that “false reporting” and the misperception that it is a common occurrence might be a strong deterrent to whether a victim would report due to the fear of not being believed or being accused of false reporting.

“There can be fear of what happens if they tell someone else, if they’ll be believed.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

“Women that have reported can be slut-shamed...because people make assumptions. If they know the person and they know they’re promiscuous or something, then they’re more than willing to shove their opinion down your throat, whether this person deserved this or not... Or if they’re not slut-shamed, then you’ll have people saying, if anyone’s interested in the girl, ‘Hey, don’t mess with her. She’ll call rape on you.’”

– **Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Fitting In. Male Service member participants perceived that fear of ostracism, or retaliation through social isolation by various means, is a central barrier to reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment within their Service. Specifically, Service members in the sessions noted that the fear of ostracism can be a powerful motivator because the military environment breeds a strong desire for approval from fellow Service members and a need to fit in with peers. Service member participants reported that although ostracism does occur across the Services, it is subtle and difficult to document for the purposes of punishment while being persistent and insidious. It can be as simple as being avoided by a friend, ignored on social media, excluded from social events, or being talked about negatively to others.

“When these kinds of allegations come forward, people pick sides. Kind of like a divorce. You side with the husband or you side with the wife...And there’s going to be reprisals...people are going to get ostracized. [There] may not be professional reprisal but I think societal-wise, there’s definitely something.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“A junior sailor around here [doesn’t have any] family, any friends, nothing. And they’re completely away from everything they know. The only things they have [are] the ones right there beside them...[why] are you going to risk being ostracized when [you’re] already in a foreign country where you know no [one] to try to do the right thing? That’s a lot of pressure for a young sailor, man or woman, to stand up and say, ‘This is wrong and that person is absolutely [to blame].’ ...you’re going to eat by yourself. You’re going to sleep by yourself. You have no liberty buddy in port...the amount of pressure on these young sailors to just fit in is mind-boggling.”

– **Navy OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

Career Concerns. Male focus group participants reported concerns about damage to one’s career for reporting are less of an issue than social retaliation, but they are still present. For the most part, Service member participants indicated feeling that they would be supported by their leadership if they were to report sexual assault or sexual harassment. However, there were some situations in which they feared career reprisal might be more likely: these included situations in which a mid- to senior leader or his or her friend is accused of sexual misconduct, or there is a perception that the accuser is making a false report for personal gain. In these situations, the accused or his or her friend may take steps to harm the victim’s career. Likewise, social retaliation can bleed into the professional realm when peers and superiors exclude the accuser from activities, which can negatively impact his or her career.

“It becomes unprofessional really easily with the limitation of, ‘I don’t want this person to come TDY with us.’ Or, ‘We’re excluding these people from these jobs.’ ...These are things that I’ve seen over my career...where people would get...sort of pushed off into a corner to where they’re moved to another section.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“People don’t want to get blackballed and I’ve heard people are like, ‘No, I don’t want to say [anything] ... they’re going to try to blackball my career and it’ll be over.” – **Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

“It could affect their careers. If you get somebody’s friend in trouble, and their friend works at command, they’re like, ‘Oh, you did this to my friend,’ or just get at you, get at you, get at you. That’s the [situation I think of] when it comes to negative outcomes of reporting something like reprisal at work.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Male Victims

In the focus group discussions with male Service members, many talked about the stigma associated with reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment as a male. They said that this stigma occurs because there is pressure to conform to the stereotype of the “masculine man,” particularly in the male-dominated culture of the military where this stereotype of hyper-masculinity is magnified. The idea of a man being sexually assaulted or harassed (either by a man or woman) is incongruent with the valued traits of strength and resilience associated with

masculinity, so a man who experiences these events may feel shame and a threat to his gender identity. By not reporting, he is able to protect the persona he has cultivated. Many male Service member participants identified with the pressure to conform to a masculine image and argued it results in a persistent barrier to reporting incidents of sexual assault or sexual harassment when the victim is male. They further argued that certain military environments seem to intensify this phenomenon, particularly those that are more isolated, more uniformly male, and consist of extremely close-knit communities, such as a ship.

“You’re afraid of repercussions as a male having something like that happen to you. Especially in a community where your peers are not just the same job, but the same gender as well. So, I mean, that definitely is a factor...Everybody knows everybody in our community.”

– **Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“A lot of this stuff doesn’t get reported, because if you sit here and think about it, a man gets assaulted, the first thing will come out is, ‘He’s a man.’ His ego. So he may not say anything. He may just keep that to himself, especially if it’s a male-on-male [situation].”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“So I think it’s been ingrained into us as society that men are supposed to be this pinnacle of masculinity, so don’t report it because it makes you seem weak.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Some male Service members in the focus groups also said that they would be less likely to report sexual assault or sexual harassment by a woman because they might not identify the behavior as problematic. These male Service members claimed that most men would either be “happy” to receive sexual advances from a woman or would dismiss inappropriate sexual behavior as a joke or inconsequential. Participants further speculated that this phenomenon may exist because men are socialized to be more sexually assertive, so they have a higher threshold for what they consider objectionable. Participants noted another reason male Service members might not realize they are being sexually assaulted or harassed is because they are not used to being objectified in society at large, so they are not primed to recognize it when it occurs.

“I, for one, have never seen a guy SARC [a] girl because I feel like, [if] they sleep together, he’s like, ‘Oh, cool, I slept with a girl.’ And then it’s, ‘All righty. A good thing.’” – **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

“I think it’s harder for males to perceive...[and] even if they perceive that it could be sexual harassment I think [they] are less likely to...be as bothered about it...Whereas women have been much more used to being objectified in society. And so, I think they’re much more aware of sexual harassment and much more sensitive to it, so they...see it better than men do, I think.”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

Sexual Harassment-Specific Barriers

Male Service member participants stated that there are several reasons their fellow Service members might be less likely to report incidents of sexual harassment. First, they said sexual harassment can be difficult to identify because of the belief that the definition is not hard and fast across all situations; much of the interpretation of sexual harassment is based on the perception of the person being harassed. Second, focus group participants said that military leadership encourages handling many cases of sexual harassment on the peer-to-peer level, rather than elevating it up the chain of command by filing a formal report. Finally, some male Service member participants indicated that they view sexual harassment as a less serious offense than sexual assault, because it is less tangible both in terms of definition and impact.

“Everyone knows sexual assault is wrong, right? That’s easy. It’s more black and white. But when it comes to sexual harassment, I think people struggle with [interpreting] that, especially our younger airmen.”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

“When we go from harassment to sexual assault...those words gauge a different type of thought process. So I might point [sexual harassment] in a [different] direction, because some things are better handled outside the hierarchy chain. Harassment is something that if it is occurring, it normally can be corrected.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

Retaliation

Male Service member participants were asked about perceived retaliation that results from reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment at their installation and within their Service, either social or professional. They were somewhat split on whether they thought that retaliation would be common. Some male Service member participants indicated that they felt social retaliation, such as damaging one’s reputation via negative gossip or engaging in ostracism, is fairly common; a number of such Service members cited examples that they had observed or heard about secondhand. Other participants reported feeling that social retaliation is rare because the atmosphere for reporting is supportive. Both groups agreed that professional reprisal is less likely to occur than social retaliation, but it remains a significant fear.

“You could have subtle [professional reprisal] where you’re not given opportunities. You’re not rated as high...I think that type of stuff probably does happen, but it’s fewer and [farther] between...I think more [often you see] the social consequences—being ostracized, people taking sides.”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

When asked about whether they have or know about any recourse if they experience retaliation for reporting, Service member participants said that while a complaint can be filed, it is difficult to prove, because most cases of retaliation are subtle and covert in nature, so the chances of guilty parties receiving punishment are slim to none. Some indicated that a more likely scenario

after reporting experiences of retaliation would be for the victim to be transferred to a new location to escape the backlash from the reporting and investigation process.

Male Service member participants were also asked who might choose to retaliate against someone who has reported sexual assault or sexual harassment and the possible motivations for retaliation. Participants said that retaliation can occur from the alleged perpetrator directly or can be carried out by his or her friends or colleagues. According to these Service members, retaliation is more likely to occur when certain characteristics of the alleged assailant are present: he or she is well liked and respected, he or she is higher ranking than the accuser or has high-ranking friends, or he or she is seen as an integral part of a small close-knit community. Likewise, retaliation is more often noted when the victim has made a prior accusation, is seen as unreliable because of past behavior, or does not fit in well in the military environment.

“If it’s that person that just comes in, does their job, doesn’t interact with anyone too much...it might be looked upon as they’re just crying wolf because they just want people to pay attention to them.”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

“If you get somebody that’s popular with everybody in trouble, then they’re like, ‘Oh, you crossed my man and I don’t want to fool with you anymore because you got our friend in trouble. So now, we all don’t like you because you got our people in trouble.’...You get somebody in trouble and then everybody else looks at you different.”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

Social Retaliation

As discussed in the previous section about barriers to reporting, social retaliation falls into two key categories: efforts to damage someone’s reputation and ostracism. Male Service member participants indicated that both instances can be subtle and difficult to pinpoint in practice. Damage to one’s reputation can take a number of forms, including spreading rumors, gossiping, posting negative social media comments about the victim, or actively seeking to blame the victim for the incident. Male participants asserted that ostracism typically consists of a Service member being shunned by former friends/colleagues or otherwise made to feel like an outcast. Service members may engage in these behaviors either in person (e.g., not speaking to someone, avoiding them on base) or online (e.g., unfriending them on Facebook, removing photos from sharing sites, ignoring messages).

“It’s the concern that I’m going to be ostracized from my social group. And again, a social group might be your work center.”

– **Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

Professional Reprisal

Male focus group participants indicated professional reprisal can be slightly more overt than social retaliation, but it is still challenging to identify it as it is happening, because those who are engaging in the reprisal can easily make excuses for their behavior and claim that it has nothing to do with the report filed by the victim. When asked to provide examples of professional reprisal, male focus group participants cited situations in which someone who reported sexual assault or sexual harassment received a lower rating on their performance review, was passed over for promotions or preferred work opportunities, or was moved to a less desirable work station.

“We had a female at one of my old shops...the person [she was] accusing of the assault was my supervisor...And when she [reported it]...she got moved out of our shop. It totally divided up the shop, where management was on the side of my supervisor saying that, ‘He couldn’t have done this.’ And she was basically blackballed and sent over to another to shop. And it finally came out, he actually did it to somebody else, so they PCS’d [Permanent Change of Station] her to another base... right after one of the seniors that was for the guy that [was accused] PCS’d to that base. Well, she PCS’d up to the same shop and he tried screwing her on her EPR [Enlisted Performance Report]...She was pretty much blacklisted.” – Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

*“The guy’s in charge and if I report it, even if I don’t get any sort of punishment, if you’re rated one, two, three, four, five, all of a sudden I’ll get rated four or three. And it won’t say why. But, somehow the case will be made and in the back of my head, I will think that I have gotten downgraded because I’ve [made] this report.”
– Air Force OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male*

Social and Digital Media

To assess the full range of behaviors related to gender relations, participants were asked about and discussed the impact of social and digital media on gender-related issues.

Social Media

Male participants indicated that Service members use a myriad of social media applications on their installations, including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Tinder. When asked if they had heard of sexual exploitation (the posting or sharing of pictures or videos without the subject’s consent), specifically with online or digital media, almost all participants said they had observed the behavior, mostly through Facebook and the Snapchat application. Male participants said it is common for their colleagues to engage in sexually explicit activities through social media, including making sexually charged comments and sharing sexual photos.

This behavior is often normalized, and Service member participants did not indicate believing that this behavior is inappropriate or behavior worth reporting or intervening.

Although almost all Service members in the sessions engaged with social media applications, older participants reported believing that usage was more common among their younger colleagues. Some said that the younger generation now shares personal and private content on these applications without regard to the content or who will be seeing the content.

“I’m a little bit older than that age group that grew up on social media. But I’m just telling you right now, when it comes to most people 22 and under, they do not care what they put on social media. They don’t care how it affects their job, how it affects OPSEC, how it affects how it makes them look—they will put and say anything. I don’t know how you combat that unless you actually go about punishing people for what they put on social media because I’ve seen it all, literally.” – **Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

Many participants expressed that the ease of sharing photos and information in the digital age facilitates the widespread sharing of sexually explicit images. However, many also expressed a general wariness of sharing information online or through social media applications. Some indicated leadership at installations has cautioned Service members against engaging in sexually inappropriate behavior online.

Sexual Harassment on Social Media

Male participants said it is easier to harass women on social media than face to face. Some participants said they felt that the pervasiveness and ease of access of social media make it an easy outlet for this type of behavior, as well as the general anonymity of the platforms. Many participants also indicated feeling that due to the nature of social media and its role in culture now days, harassment online would not stop.

“Oh yeah, [laughter] women get catcalled. I’m sure if anyone in here is in a relationship, you can see how a woman lives life. How much through social media men try to get at her. Get her to send nudes or flirt with her, say raunchy things. You join the military and it’s a rougher route. I’m not saying that we should be doing that. We should hold ourselves to a standard. We should be professionals. But we’re also [EXPLITIVE] just a bunch of kids in uniforms. [Female Service members] join into a branch that male-to-female ratio is just wickedly outnumbered. And then they have experience of being a woman in today’s world through social media, and they think it’s going to stop, but it’s not. Because how are you going to stop those? You can’t.”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Image Sharing

Male participants indicated that sharing sexually explicit content and photos appeared in different forms on military installations. Many participants indicated that they had engaged in sharing nude images (of themselves and others) consensually and nonconsensually among smaller texting groups, as well as through mass social media. This trend was more prevalent in focus group discussions at OCONUS locations, and many participants explained that being in a foreign country, away from their loved ones, was a common reason for sharing sexually charged images.

Facebook Groups. Participants in every focus group indicated that they had heard of the “Marines United” scandal in which Marine Corps members were found to be sharing sexually explicit content via a Facebook group, some of which was posted without the subject’s consent. Most participants, although they were not aware of specific Facebook groups, reported that they felt confident that these groups exist in all branches and are “rampant.”

“It is a Facebook group. And there’s several of them, right? Not just that one [Marines United]. But I know they’re on those, right? So it is rampant. And, unfortunately, in the days of technology, there’s no way that you’re going to be able to stop that because if some person’s going to post it, it’s still going to be seen by everybody.”

– Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male

Sexting. Focus group participants indicated sexting—the act of sharing sexually explicit images, videos, messages, or emails (usually by cell phone) between consenting adults—is a relatively common practice among Service members. Many of the male Service members in the focus groups did not feel sympathy for female Service members whose images were distributed beyond the intended recipient of a sexting exchange.

“I can’t sympathize for the females that send those photos out to people. I understand you sent it to someone, but you better—if it’s your boyfriend, I hope you trust your boyfriend enough to where he doesn’t send it to his homies and that he only keeps it for himself for his own pleasure, but when you’re a girl...they’re sharing their sexting to every dude that they encounter. It’s just I can’t feel bad for you. I really can’t. So when that incident came out and it’s all these females, the Marine females, and I’ve met some Marine females, I can’t feel bad for them because that’s how they are.”

– Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

Revenge Porn. Many participants had witnessed others sending or receiving “revenge porn,” when a party shares sexually explicit photos, videos, or comments of someone who they felt had wronged them in some way without his or her consent for the purpose of causing the other party emotional or professional harm. Although many Service members in the sessions were aware of the practice and had seen it on either personal messages or social media, they were hesitant to report the content to anyone.

“If I’m in a group chat and someone sends [revenge porn], I’m going to send a LOL or something. Just to be honest, I don’t know if I’d necessarily snitch or tell if it’s just in group chat. If I’m in a group chat with you, we’re clearly friends. Now, I don’t know what lead up to you sending that. But now, if you’re posting a Facebook status about how some [EXPLETIVE] did something to you—and here’s her nudes, then I’m not necessarily going to share it. But I’m not going to report the post either.”

– Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

Changes Over Time

Participants were asked how issues related to sexual assault and sexual harassment have changed over time. Focal areas that emerged included trainings, a change in definitions, the work environment, an increase in reporting, and resources.

Training

Participants discussed how trainings related to gender relations, specifically sexual assault, have changed over time. These changes include shifting emphasis on a zero tolerance policy and Service members’ responsibility toward one another in preventing sexual assault. Participants also noted that the frequency of trainings had increased over time.

“Historically, we’ve leaned a lot more towards putting policies in place, directing our attention to victims that were sexually assaulted or sexually harassed, and now what you see is a zero tolerance policy for it.”

– Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

“I was going to say, about 2011 or so. That’s when I noticed there was a very big shift in the tone of how the training was presented...There was definitely an image of you’re tolerating this sort of behavior and you shouldn’t. You need to have a zero-tolerance policy on this...the tone definitely became much more aggressive. There was a lot more training put out there...It became a much more aggressive campaign for people to understand it on that level of this is an obligation, or a responsibility you have to your shipmates to protect them was something that had not really been as much of the conversation before that campaign.”

– Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Male

“In 2002, you know how many SHARP classes I went to? Zero, because it didn’t exist. Okay? You know how many EO trainings I had? Zero. Because they didn’t exist. And then by ’08 these programs start being created and built up and now we have a very formalized program.”

– Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male

Some male participants noted that the increase in frequency has come at a time when internal emphasis on gender-related issues has amplified, but so has external attention from the media.

“So, I just think that there’s a lot more trainings today. There’s a lot more emphasis on it. I think there’s a lot of media emphasis on it. And so I think commanders are a lot more nervous about being accused of allowing it to happen. So, I think that might be part of the reason, too, why they emphasize it, but from the top down we have a lot of mandated trainings that people have to do.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

Definitions

Focus group participants referenced changes to the definitions of gender-related issues, including sexual assault and sexual harassment. Male Service member participants noted that certain behaviors or comments that in the past have been seen as benign or as jokes are now perceived as falling under the current definitions of sexual assault or sexual harassment. Some participants indicated feeling that the change in the definitions has cause a spike in incidences of sexual assault due to a new understanding of what behaviors are considered sexual assault.

“The definition of sexual assault and sexual harassment has changed over the last two decades. Before certain things were just fun and games, and it wasn’t constituting harassment or sexual assault or hostile work environment.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“In 2011, they completely redid the definitions of sexual assault and the definitions of sexual harassment—changing those definitions. I don’t necessarily think it was a bad thing but it definitely put a huge spot light—when they did that, put a huge spotlight on the military because—on the DOD in general because all the sudden we spiked. And, they were over here, ‘Oh my gosh, we’ve got this humongous problem.’ Well, do we really have a humongous problem or is it the fact that we made just about anything ...that may have given somebody sexual gratification, that now became sexual assault. Whereas, in the past it might have just been adjudicated as sexual harassment.” – **Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

Environment Shift

Male focus group participants noted that as the definitions of sexual harassment have changed over time, there has been a shift in the work place environment. Behaviors that were once brushed off as a part of the culture are now taken seriously, including the display of sexual imagery, crude comments, and inappropriate jokes.

Images

Participants who had spent a longer period of time in the military noted a change in imagery found at work stations. Many commented that in the past, sexual images from magazines and other explicit material could easily be observed in the work place. However, today these types of materials are not as prevalent in military work spaces.

“I mean, I think for any of us that deployed to Iraq, in the early years, it would not be uncommon to maybe see in a work center a picture from a magazine and it displayed on a wall where now it’s very clear that guidance has passed that it’s not acceptable. So, it’s a more, I would say, conducive and healthy environment for females, I mean, right?”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

“A lot of people really do pay attention to themselves. Or at least a lot of them have tried in medical. They definitely walk on eggshells around that type of stuff. Because I really don’t see too much of it come up in the workplace. I’ve never heard of anyone that actually got in trouble for making a joke like that. There are a couple instances where it might be an in-between joke between a male and female or something, and that might happen, but—how can I put this? There’s never been an instance that things really got shut down and everybody had to come together, it’s like, ‘Look, [there’s] been inappropriate comments going around, we need to stop.’ We never had that or anything like it.” – **Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

“Some of us older guys, we remember going on our first ship, and we had girlie mags and all that kind of stuff available and out in the open unless the CO on CMC put his foot down. And all that’s gone, at least visually.”

– **Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

Language

Male participants also discussed a change in what is considered appropriate language. Many Service member participants discussed a sense of needing to watch what they say and who they say it to. This self-policing of language was cited as a cultural shift caused by awareness and concerns around sexual harassment.

“I mean, I even find, myself, you have to at times tiptoe. You’re around a bunch of your buddies and you may say something. But you got to talk like you’re talking to your mom. And that’s not a bad thing but it’s also a definite mindset from what I first started my time in the Marine Corps as just saying anything and everything that you wanted because you knew nobody was going to be offended. And if they did, then they were a bunch of [expletive]”

and you didn't care about it. Sorry."

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Although the imagery and language that is deemed acceptable in the workspace has shifted over time, some participants noted that this change may only be seen at the surface level and that many of these behaviors still happen but are less visible. In other words, the new face of inappropriate gender-related behaviors is less overt and more covert in nature.

"I've been in 21 years. And, when I first came in, it was overt sexism, sexual harassment. It was in your face. It was the posters we hung on the walls in the work center, it was your screensaver. It was talked about all the time. And now, it's very covert, right? Everybody knows it's wrong so people slide it in, right? You know you're not going to talk that way in front of the skipper and you know that. So, you do it with your boys or your girls or wherever and you slide it in there, right?"

– **Navy OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

A few participants noted that the evolution of gender-related issues may vary substantially by career field. Career fields with a higher proportion of women may have undergone a larger shift in terms of workplace culture, whereas careers fields with a lower proportion of women may have seen smaller shifts due to a difficulty in changing long-held belief systems and behaviors.

"From my perspective, it's very career field cultural oriented. Every career field has its own different culture. I can definitely tell you that between a lot of inappropriate touching and everything else, you do see that people kind of go along to get along because when they don't get along or go along with the games that we play in some of these jobs and units, they get ostracized relatively quickly." – **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Male**

Reporting

While discussing how gender-related issues have changed over time, many male participants cited the increase in formal reports of sexual assault. Participants indicated believing that the increase was a positive change, noting that the number of assaults may not be going up, but the number of victims willing to come forward to file a report has increased due to a shift in the environment and the military's effort to create appropriate recourses.

"It seems like 2012, there was a big step up and change throughout the Marine Corps and that's when we started reporting, a lot more education, a lot more awareness. And, it was sort of shocking to me because I'd gone out on joint duty a year or two before that and came back to the Marine Corps when all of that was in stride. I noticed a really distinct shift from my time to just two short years before that. [The increase] was in part a positive trend...because we had environments that were conducive to where [victims]

felt comfortable reporting sexual assaults.”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

“And I’ve heard people say, ‘We do all this training and we have all these programs and yet the number of reported sexual assaults is going up and up and up.’ Okay, let’s be real. Do you honestly think there’s any more sexual assaults right now than there was 20 years ago? No. But we’re obviously doing something right because we’ve opened it up and we’ve made it okay to report it. So, our numbers are going up.”

– **Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

Male Victims

Male Service member participants noted that as reporting has increased overall, there has also been an increase in the number of male victims willing to come forward and make a formal complaint for both sexual assault and sexual harassment. Often this increase was attributed to younger Service members’ understanding and attitude toward unwanted sexual behaviors.

“I would say in the past couple of years because I’ve been where I am now for a while at the same job, we see more and more reports of accusations of sexual harassment or even sexual assault male on male from crew members onboard ships and it seems like you have men who are willing to accuse or levy an accusation against another male tend to be very junior...So that may be a change or a trend that’s happening in some other commands with more junior members because you do see a few more reports of males saying this other guy did something that’s out of bounds and starting an investigation there. You see a little bit more of that.”

– **Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Male**

Resources

Focus group participants also pointed to an increase in resources for victims of sexual assault as a positive change in the military’s efforts to address issues related to sexual assault. Some male Service member participants stated that the dedicated resources and the increase in awareness of those resources have grown.

“The resources for victims has definitely improved. It used to be like VWAC [Victim and Witness Assistance Council] was something nobody knew what that was and it’s a checklist thing. And now, you don’t want to ever be that guy that has any gap in a VWAC on your stats because you would get set on fire right away. I think everybody knows what the VWAC actually does and how they interact with the SARC. You see the SARC on base. They’re doing the 5Ks and such. They’re always around, and that’s important. Those staffs are pretty well supported everywhere. People know who they are. So, I tend

to think the resources are definitely improved.” – Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Male

Chapter 3: Female Participant Themes

The perceptions of active duty Service members are vital in assessing and understanding the policies and programs designed to address sexual assault and sexual harassment within the four DoD Services. Findings from the focus groups also illustrate opportunities for improvement. This chapter will cover the key themes identified by the female focus group participants, including participants' thoughts about general culture, leadership, their perceptions of the SAPR/SHARP program, sexual assault and sexual harassment, bystander intervention, reporting of alleged incidents of sexual assault, digital and social media, and changes over time.

General Culture

Participants were asked about the general culture at their installation and in their Service. A discussion of the broader cultural context of the installations included in this study and the military at large helps set the stage for a better understanding of the dynamics surrounding sexual assault in this environment. Key themes that emerged centered on gender relations and alcohol.

Gender Relations

Female participants discussed aspects of gender relations both at their installation and within their Service, including the topics of communication challenges, perceived inequality and hostility, efforts to avoid sexual assault and sexual harassment, masculine culture, professionalism, and alcohol use.

Most female participants agreed that male Service members convey some degree of confusion or discomfort regarding how to communicate with female colleagues. Female participants perceive that their male counterparts appear uncomfortable during interactions with women and interact differently with male and female colleagues. They discussed feeling the need to set boundaries for what is acceptable and teach their male colleagues how to interact with members of the opposite sex, including what is appropriate to say in the work environment.

“This is how you’re supposed to interact with me. How awkward is that? [laughter]. I understand that we’re supposed to lead. I mean, we’re officers and we’re women, but that’s another interesting point is that it’s the woman’s responsibility to teach the junior sailors, or any men, how they’re allowed to interact with you. So, that puts the onus back on us, which is another way of having it be more of you establishing yourself because there’s no men-on-men training happening on how they’re supposed to.”

– Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Female

Still, other participants noted that male Service members are afraid of possible accusations of sexual assault or sexual harassment and, thus, are careful when interacting with female colleagues. Like their male counterparts, female Service members in the focus groups noted that this can also lead to tension between male and female Service members.

“Because right now, I think there’s a lot of fear, especially among the males in the chain of command [who] do get in trouble for addressing females [that are] out of clothing regs or whatever. Where there’s that unfair treatment in an unfair positive way, where they’re so afraid of the potential for sexual assault and sexual harassment that we’re creating a culture of other, with the females. Where it’s like, ‘Okay, well, we don’t want to stick one female on a team to go down to the wash rack. She has to have a battle buddy just in case there’s going to be a sexual assault.’”

– **Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Perceived Inequality and Hostility

A few female participants mentioned being treated differently because of their gender. Some participants shared examples of male Service members treating their female coworkers as an inconvenience because of a sentiment that female Service members are present due to their gender and not out of mission need, and in fact, should not be sent out on missions due to their gender. In addition, some female participants mentioned male Service members sometimes use derogatory labels to classify them.

Similarly, female participants also indicated that they felt they are not taken as seriously or respected as much as their male counterparts. Some participants reported believing that it is harder as a female to move up in ranks. They noted that there are a limited number of female Service members in higher ranking positions. Furthermore, female participants discussed being told they are in more prestigious roles and higher ranks due to their gender and not their ability.

“‘Well, she’s only doing better because she’s female,’ or, ‘They got their pin because they’re female.’ You hear that stuff a lot, and it needs to be stopped. It’s not because someone’s female. It’s because they’re just better than you are and you can’t accept that. Just not something a lot of our male counterparts would ever want to accept.”

– **Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

In addition, some female participants indicated that leadership tends to be more protective of female Service members than male members. This may take the form of isolating them to their own barrack or putting them on a battle buddy team (i.e., another female Service member).

Efforts to Avoid Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Other female participants explained that they feel the need to make efforts to avoid situations that could facilitate sexual assault and sexual harassment. Some do so by ensuring that they have a battle buddy or by separating themselves from male Service members in potentially risky situations (e.g., when alcohol is being consumed). Many female participants said male Service members are afraid of possible accusations of sexual assault or sexual harassment and, thus, are careful when interacting with female colleagues.

“I think that’s where that blur line is because alcohol just severely—your decision-making abilities are down when you drink alcohol. And if you didn’t want to get into a situation where, whether or not it was sexual assault, I mean, putting yourself into that kind of situation, that’s why we always preach have a buddy or somebody with you all the time. That way you can kind of know if you’re making the right decisions in that time. But alcohol is a bad idea when you’re mixing between males, females of the age group that most Marines are in their 20s. They don’t have a whole lot of other things on their mind.”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Male-Dominated Environment

Female participants noted that many male Service members fail to see that their gender-related conversations make female Service members uncomfortable, or continue using the same language despite knowing it makes female Service members uncomfortable. Some participants reported believing it is often up to female Service members to set boundaries and inform male colleagues when conversations are inappropriate. Some participants mentioned becoming desensitized to these types of discussions and found themselves joining into the conversations.

“In my shop, everyone just talks about whatever they want. If the guys start talking about females or whatever, me personally, I don’t really care unless—because I know my guys. They’re not bad guys. But if all the girls know that if something makes them uncomfortable, we can shut them up real quick. They listen to us. If we get uncomfortable, we’ll let them know, but usually, nothing makes us uncomfortable.”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

“And I will be very honest. As a female, I have become a little desensitized to a lot of the things that, as a woman, may not be okay. When you are in such a male-dominated group, I was not the way that I am now like before. So you do become a little desensitized.”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

Professionalism

Attitudes and opinions related to the topic of professionalism were a common focus of discussion throughout the focus groups. Many participants indicated that young recruits are immature compared to the cohorts that came before them. Similar to their male counterparts, female Service members who participated in the focus groups noted that young junior staff engage in a variety of immature behaviors, chief among them a lack of humility, disregard for privacy, and inappropriate comments or relationships.

“They’re getting promoted a little younger than we did coming up. They’re very young and immature in dealing with certain situations where they think it’s okay.” –**Marine Corps OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

However, it is worth noting that some participants indicated that they felt more pressure to behave in a professional manner now than before. In particular, female participants, and especially female senior leadership, expressed that they felt acute pressure to remain professional at all times.

“I feel from my experience that there’s definitely been an increase towards professionalism...But I fully understand that might just be the units I’ve been in. And I’m in the National Guard. And, I’ve been at generally pretty high headquarters over the past few years.”

–**Army OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

“I always say, ‘What are my Marines going to say?’ Whether they say, ‘She’s too laid back. She’s too straight. She’s too professional.’ So I have to leave my house with that mentality, that what am I going to behave like today? And it’s always going to be professional. I always say, ‘No one’s going to be more professional than I.’”

–**Marine Corps OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Women in the Military

Many participants throughout the focus group sessions mentioned times when leadership created a negative tone and environment for women, though this was discussed as an exception rather than as the norm. There was a discussion among the groups that females face a unique challenge by serving in the military, a male-dominated environment. Most Service member participants indicated feeling that this culture negatively impacted the military at large.

“Some male leadership straight up told people, ‘Stay away from the females.’ Or, ‘This one’s worthless. Don’t work with them. Females shouldn’t even be in the Army.’ Because they still have that good-old-boy mentality.”

– **Army OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

“If we were to say something about it, [leaders would say] ‘Oh, she’s just a female. She’s just using her gender—or she’s just complaining.’ But say a guy were to do it, they’d be like, ‘Okay. Maybe this is serious.’”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Alcohol

When discussing the general culture at their installations, female Service members in the focus groups noted that alcohol plays a large role in social situations.

Alcohol in Social Situations

The majority of female participants expressed that alcohol plays a critical role in social settings. Due to limited activities around the installations, alcohol is a focal point of off duty time. Some participants mentioned that alcohol can also be used as a form of escape, whether it is from their location, mission, or being away from family. Although alcohol use is prevalent across the installations, there were discussions on the importance of being a responsible drinker and making sure to not drink and drive.

“Alcohol is a necessity. We have no freedom, so hey, alcohol gives us a freedom of mind. Don’t have to think about work or anything. You just go out, drink, parties in your room, drink. After work, drink. I know people who go home every day after work and drink. I know people who can drink before work. You’re at work. [inaudible] come and drink some more.”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

“I would hate for people to think of alcohol as an escape. Well, for sadly for many, I mean, that’s what alcohol is. And like other people voice, when there’s nothing else to really do in Great Falls, that’s what people turn to. That’s their way of fun. That’s their way of enjoyment. That’s their way of doing something other than posting to the field, coming back, and doing that all over again.” – **Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Perceptions of the SAPR/SHARP Program

The Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) is the DoD office responsible for the oversight of Sexual Assault policy. SAPRO collaborates with all of the military Services and their programs to effectively manage sexual assault and responses to those assaults. The name of each Service’s program differs slightly, for instance the Army’s sexual assault prevention program is SHARP (Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention), whereas the Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force call their program SAPR (Sexual Assault Prevention & Response). In spite of the naming differences and varying mission statements, all of the offices share a common mission to prevent, educate, intervene, and provide resources should a military member experience sexual assault, and in some cases, sexual harassment. This section provides an overview of how the program as a whole is viewed across the Services in both CONUS and OCONUS locations. Specifically, perceptions of SAPR/SHARP, training, resources, and suggestions for improvement according to the interviewed female Service members will be discussed.

General SAPR/SHARP Perceptions

Participants were asked about what comes to mind when they think of SAPR/SHARP. Overall, female Service members in the focus groups knew what SAPR/SHARP is and had a general sense of how it functions. However, the perceptions of SAPR/SHARP varied across participants. Specifically, female participants fell into two groups: those who indicated that they felt SAPR/SHARP is a valuable program and those who had a limited understanding of how the

SAPR/SHARP program operates. The second camp's perceptions of the SAPR/SHARP program were slightly negative. For example, when asked about their thoughts about the SAPR/SHARP program, many responded with simple answers such as "rape" or "sexual assault." Others indicated that training comes to mind, which prompts reactions such as, "Oh no" or "Not again," in response to having another training to attend. Very few female participants mentioned the role the program plays in prevention of assault or what the program does to provide support to victims of sexual assault or harassment.

However, the female Service members in the sessions who were more knowledgeable about the SAPR/SHARP program indicated that they believed the program does a good job in training people how to use the resources and understand their options should they experience an assault. However, they did not believe the program trains command and health care professionals properly on how to handle victims' after care.

"I think a lot of it comes down to, they do a really good job at training victims, who to report to, how to do it, what your options are, but not for a command for the health care professionals taking care of these people. It just seems like everybody is defaulting to absolutely not even going down that road." – **Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Another group of participants indicated Service members may not feel comfortable engaging in the reporting process and seeking help after an assault because of their or their supervisor's unfamiliarity with the SAPR/SHARP program and processes. Without the support of or guidance from superiors, many participants indicated Service members would be less likely to seek out SAPR/SHARP resources.

"If they don't feel comfortable coming forward to somebody like that, it's going to be even more challenging. Or if they don't know who to go to in that sort of situation, it's going to be even more challenging. And then throw in the fact that maybe their supervisor doesn't know how the system works and they can't help them. Or they think they're being helpful, and they mess things up for them." – **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Enlisted Female**

Other female focus group members stated that the program does a good job protecting victims by maintaining their privacy and being discreet. They reported feeling discretion and protection of the victim is important, and the ability of the SAPR/SHARP program to maintain a victim's privacy has improved.

"I think they protect the victims more now than they used to... We used to have to send reports for every time there was a sexual assault on base. And now we don't because they try and protect what the victim goes through. Because obviously, no one wants their dirty laundry aired out to everyone, so I think they're doing a better job."
– **Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Overall, views about the SAPR/SHARP program were mixed. Some participants indicated that they believed SAPR/SHARP trains Service members well on how to use resources and how to report an incident. Other participants indicated there may be some discomfort around accessing resources provided by the program due to lack of knowledge about how to use SAPR/SHARP as a resource. Importantly, focus group members said they felt SAPR/SHARP has come a long way in maintaining the privacy of victims in a sexual assault, which is important to the functionality of the program.

Training

Participants were asked a series of questions surrounding SAPR/SHARP training, such as its effectiveness, the characterization of men and women in training, and how training is viewed by command and Service members. Overall, female Service members in the sessions commented that the training is valuable the first time but repeated presentations of the same training are viewed as ineffective.

“You have staff NCOs that have been in for forever and they’re like, ‘It’s the same class for the last however many years.’ So you’re on your first enlistment or second. You’re still kind of just, ‘Oh, it’s the same thing.’ But they’ve been in three terms, four, whatever time that they’re in. It’s the same concept. Maybe they added a video to the PowerPoint. So it makes the class a little bit longer. So you’re just like, ‘Come on, dude. It’s the same class. There’s no difference.’ The same people are teaching it until that person gets replaced.” – **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

Participants indicated that they felt SAPR/SHARP training is too frequent. Female participants mentioned the rate of recurrence causes Service members of both genders to tune out of training and take it less seriously. Further, they suggested that the training be more in depth and less frequent to minimize fatigue and repetition.

“The frequency of SAPR training over the last four or five years has increased almost to the point of ad nauseam to where it felt like we were talking about it at every single commander’s call. After a while, there seemed to be an impression of ‘Oh, this is another SAPR brief,’ and people would just turn off to it for the 10 minutes that it was discussed. I think they have to balance frequency of training with value of training.”
– **Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

“Maybe we allow the wing commanders to have something every two years where we do a really deep dive or something. Is it a perfect solution? Maybe not, but would you help maybe minimize the feelings that, ‘God, I’m sitting through this again.’” – **Air Force CONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Training Success and Effectiveness

Some female participants, varying in rank and location, reported that they felt training is valuable and effective. For example, they said they felt training is ahead of the civilian world and the military maintains a continued focus on issues related to sexual assault and sexual harassment.

“I would almost say, especially in recent events, the Navy or DoD is almost ahead of the issue when you look at the civilian population as a whole. We’ve been talking about this because of a scandal several years ago, and we’ve ramped up the conversation, education, and evolved to probably something that’s more meaningful than it used to be.”

– **Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Other female participants stated that they dislike training due to the use of multiple PowerPoint presentations; the chief complaint was the lack of realism in many of these presentations. However, others reported feeling that the scenarios and the discussion surrounding the “real life” examples in training, like bystander intervention training, are very effective.

“They do real-life scenarios that could actually happen. You see what’s playing out and they escalate it. They’re just like, ‘Is this okay?’ If that’s not okay then they keep escalating it where is the stopping point and where do you intervene in this situation. So, I find that helpful.”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

“I think the ones that they do in the theater because when somebody can see themselves as that sailor sitting there drinking a drink, and somebody put something in their drink, and this is what happened the next day, that may be that one sailor that was sitting there and saying, ‘Dang. That happened to me.’ I think seeing it like that is better. I don’t think watching PowerPoints is effective at all sometimes. Because with a PowerPoint, you just sit there and click through.” – **Navy OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Some female Service members in the sessions indicated small group sessions make training more effective. Those participants said they felt like groups of eight to 15 Service men and women are the best size to conduct small group training. Participants stated when groups are smaller, there is more involvement and participation, which increases the effectiveness of the training.

“I started doing it more small groups and it’s been way more effective than the masses even though sometimes it’s hard with the schedule for when flags are going out but I mean, when you do it over multiple days, it’s worth it.”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

“I would say that’s where I’ve had my most interesting training or got the most out of it. I mean, we can sit in front of the computer and CBT [computer-based training] or go to the mandatory class and listen to the person present it. But being in a small group circle and things like that. It’s been more real, more relatable for me.”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Lastly, participants indicated they appreciated when the training was participatory and indicated that although they did not always find participation comfortable, they said they felt it was more engaging than listening to a PowerPoint. Most participants who indicated feeling this way stated they would much rather be actively involved than sitting quietly while someone talked at them.

“I will not listen if it’s just somebody preaching at me. But if we’re forced to get up and discuss and see the scenarios and live them a little bit, that’s better.” – **Air Force CONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Training as a Mandatory Activity

Much like their male counterparts, female participants indicated feeling like they are “checking the box” after a certain point when it comes to SAPR/SHARP training. They indicated they are there out of obligation and not invested in the training.

“Every year, I have to sit through the training again. The honesty is I’m tired of sitting through the training every single year, but I put on the happy face, though, because I have to. I have a responsibility. I understand that, but I think our messaging, DoD, is not done appropriately.”

– **Air Force CONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

“I feel like we’ve gotten a little too close to the direction of just hitting the wickets and checking out the training and less of making it a cultural shift and getting in the Marines’ lives and making it become a longer term thing versus a one-hour group PowerPoint, sign the roster and move on, and nobody actually gets anything out of it, maybe one gets the phone number.”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Participants talked about how the method of delivery is often an indicator of how seriously the training would be taken. In some cases, the presenter delivered material at a rapid pace and gave the audience little time to engage with or comprehend what they were being presented, which participants indicated sent the message that the training was not a top priority. Alternatively, other participants indicated some presenters made the training more interesting and were able to connect with the audience. These presenters were able to make the content of the presentations engaging, which participants felt increased the effectiveness of the material.

“A lot of times, it’s just someone at UVA [Uniformed Victim Advocate] who’s been there for a long time, or is not as engaged or whatever, they’re like ‘I’ve just got to check this box.’” – **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

“We had people from outside the unit train our unit. But they were good. They were in civilian clothes. They didn’t get caught up by rank or anything. They used humor, but at the same time knew when to be serious during training.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Gendered Nature of Training

Participants were questioned about gender differences they experienced or observed in training sessions. Female Service members in the focus groups focused primarily on two main areas: males portrayed as the perpetrator and males feeling attacked in SAPR/SHARP training.

Participants noted that training often portrays men as the assaulter and women as the victim. Female Service members in the sessions indicated training rarely portrays male-on-male contact or women as the perpetrator. Participants stated when male-on-male sexual assault is mentioned, it seems almost like an afterthought rather than an actual issue that needs to be addressed.

“Well, in scenarios, the victim is always a female. There are not enough scenarios or stories being told about males being the victim. And I think when that happens, that’s how male sailors don’t really speak up or really tell their story. It’s mostly all about females and not enough males.”
– **Navy CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

“They [Trainers] just say, ‘Don’t think you aren’t the only ones that get sexually assaulted. Men get sexually assaulted, too.’ And that’s it. But they don’t explain how, I guess, or anything or go into detail. It’s just like, ‘Yeah, men get sexually assaulted, too.’”
– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

Because males are often depicted as the alleged perpetrators of the assault in training, female participants reported that they believed male Service members often feel attacked in training, and even by the SAPR/SHARP program at large. In some cases, the participants indicated male Service members are thought to disengage from training and lose focus because they feel they will not be assaulted.

“Most of the time if they show where a male is being assaulted, most of the time the guys don’t really say anything because I guess it’s a pride or an ego issue that how can you let that happen to you? You’re a guy. You should not let that happen to you. But it can happen to anyone, not just females. It can

happen to both males and females.”

– **Navy CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

“I feel like in the training a lot of males just don’t believe that it’s going to happen to them. It’s not a problem to them. They see it as it’s almost like it’s our problem. It’s the female’s problem and it’ll never happen to them. Therefore, they’re not really afraid of things like that.”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Female participants acknowledged that although training has changed over time, male Service members might still feel attacked. Some participants indicated males might fear social and workplace situations because of the potential for someone to file a sexual assault or sexual harassment report on them. The fear is based on the perception of how the community, program, and military view sexual assault and sexual harassment. Participants indicated that they believed some stereotypes still hold true, which affects the morale of males because they are considered potential perpetrators.

“I think that beforehand, they feel attacked every time you mention SAPR, every time you mention sexual assault. And they’re scared because they feel like no matter what they do, even if they’re in the right—because it’s both sides that come in the wrong. That no matter what they do, they’ll be blamed for whatever situation they happen to be in or put themselves in.”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

SAPR/SHARP Resources

SAPR/SHARP programs provide assistance to Service members, covering a range of resources when dealing with sexual assault and/or sexual harassment. Those resources include how to report if one has been a victim of assault, knows someone who has been assaulted, and how to prevent sexual assault. Other services include Uniformed Victim Advocates (UVA), Victims’ Legal Counsel (VLC), training, and various websites addressing sexual assault. As part of the focus groups, participants were asked about their knowledge and use of the resources provided by the SAPR/SHARP programs. Most of the Service members in the sessions were able to verbalize how to use, find, or access their various resources. However, there was a small group who indicated that they felt services are not as accessible as they could be.

Participants indicated the SAPR/SHARP programs have several resources accessible to Service members. They indicated resources such as UVAs, chaplains, medical personnel, and the SAPR/SHARP offices. In contrast to male participants, it appears that female participants were more knowledgeable about SAPR/SHARP, indicated that services are readily accessible, and believed the resources to be useful and provide a good source of current information to Service members.

“You got a lot of resources. There is a lot. And it’s like in those moments that you realize that, ‘I’m going to have to use one of these.’”

– Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female

“I know our command’s pretty good. That information’s readily available, again, on billboards so it can be seen and I’m sure your guys’ commands are that way too, but it’s also maintained and it’s updated.”

– Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Officer, Female

The majority of Service members in the focus groups said they know how to access SAPR/SHARP resources such as UVAs, counselors, and crisis hotlines. Yet some female participants reported that they felt the services are limited and indicated having negative experiences with those resources. Some of the participants indicated that the resources are more like a referral to additional services rather than actual support to help deal with an incident. For example, when a female Service member sought help after an assault, she said she felt as though she was passed along to the next person instead of being treated as a person in need of help.

“They’re advocates so they can point you to the right direction, and the right people to talk to and the right people to go see. So it’s pretty much they’re facilitators of the program in order to try to prevent it, and then respond to it.” – **Marine Corps CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

The SAPR/SHARP program’s role in retaliation or repercussions against sexual assault reporters was also discussed. Opinions were split between female Service members in the sessions as to whether their chain of command, Investigator General (IG) offices, or Equal Opportunity (EO) officers could help in such situations. Some indicated these services and offices could help to mitigate retaliation, whereas others felt those same services and offices would be of little use and possibly be counterproductive to getting the problem resolved.

“I mean technically you have an EO [laughter], but that’s just going to make your life worse. That point they’re going to say you’re weak minded or that you can’t handle it. Somebody’s going to say that this probably, the culture, it was to be expected, like if you do this, you shouldn’t be here.”

– Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female

“First of all, you need to go to your chain of command, and you need to explain to them what happened and what is going on. Your chain of command is the—I mean really, those are the only people that can help you because if it’s within that command, the chain of command can help you. If it’s outside that command, then that command needs to contact whoever is over that person that’s retaliating against you and try to handle it that way.”

– Navy OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female

Finally, female participants noted men and women use resources differently. Female participants indicated that they felt women would access SAPR/SHARP resources much more than men. They also indicated that men would most likely choose to not access services due to the idea that their masculinity would be challenged or questioned should the person they connected with from the program be of the same gender.

“I don’t really hear of men using that resource there. You don’t hear it. You hear women, ‘SAPR did this for me,’ or, ‘I went to SAPR,’ but you don’t really hear the men ever using that resource or needing to use it. We know it’s happening. We know they should be using that resource, but you don’t really ever hear of them using it.”

– **Air Force CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

“I think, in my experience, women in general are more apt to say something, but not to a male company commander, even a platoon leader, platoon sergeant. I think, in my experience, even to a male behavior health officer. They’re more inclined to say something to a female behavior health officer. And I think, in my experience, males are even more inclined to say something to a female behavior health officer than to a male behavior health officer or, any other male for that matter. For fear of their manhood and their machismo is challenged.” – **Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement

Participants were asked to make recommendations or give suggestions on how training could be improved. Training was viewed as necessary because of the diverse backgrounds of Service members. The opportunities for improvement that were suggested by participants fell into four areas: size of training session, customization of training content, presenters of training material, and incorporating males as victims into the training.

Service members who participated in the focus groups indicated that SAPR/SHARP training is presented in large group settings. Typically, PowerPoints are presented by a SAPR representative, an officer in the unit, or another Service member. Participants indicated the large size of trainings limits their effectiveness, because Service members do not engage in trainings with such large audiences. Therefore, participants suggested decreasing the group sizes for training to allow for adequate discussions of material and personalized attention.

“I think some of it is starting a dialogue maybe in a smaller group setting. I think sometimes we do training and it’s like all mansplaining. You’ve got your entire ship there, or even just the section. It’s still a really hard time. Or we should just be having those uncomfortable conversations in smaller groups at a divisional or department level.”

– **Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

“So I think smaller groups are important. When you’re in such a large group, people are concerned about what people are going to think if they say something. The anonymity you have here, I think we have to get down to breaking people into smaller groups.”

– **Army OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Like their male counterparts, female Service members in the focus groups suggested that training be customized based on rank, job function, or experience. By creating specialized content, participants reported that they felt this type of training would cover the most relevant messages for a particular group. For example, young Service members just entering the military would need basic sexual assault and sexual harassment training on prevention, situational awareness, definitions, and interventions, whereas more senior Service members would be trained on prevention, handling the reporting of sexual assault and sexual harassment by Service members of their command, and how to deal with consequences within the unit resulting from an accusation or incident.

“I wish we would talk more about training specifically for leaders, for XO’s, for CO’s, for CMC’s, for leader people. And I think, for myself, because I’ve been doing it so long, and I always have an issue where you get—or a CO or a XO and they always give you this, ‘My last SARC used to,’ or, ‘My last SAPR used to.’ I know they get refresher classes. They’re supposed to every 90 days. But I think it’s always a disconnect with them. Say you get a case, you have to explain to them maybe the last person didn’t do it right or the last person didn’t do this. They need to get some kind of leadership refresher for base CO’s, XO’s, for people that are in these positions.”

– **Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

“You will do a E5 to E6 tier. You would do an E7 to E9 tier. You would do a CGO tier, an FGO tier, and an O6 tier.”

– **Air Force CONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Similar to their male counterparts, female participants indicated that the training presenter is very important and has a large influence on how the training is received and attended. The presenter is the person who determines the level of engagement and interaction, according to the Service members in the sessions. Participants said they felt the presenters should be invested in the training and be able to provide thorough and thoughtful information.

“A gentleman came in, supposed to be doing our SHARP training. And, of course, it was primarily a male-dominated room and they’re all like, ‘Ugh, I know. I know. It’s just as painful for you as it is for me, having to cover this subject.’ So, of course, right then and there, I felt like nobody was really listening to what was taking place or what we were supposed to be getting out of the presentation.” – **Army OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

“We need to go out there and find people that are willing to talk about their experiences, so we put a face to the situation. Because we do these case studies and anonymous and stuff like that, and I get that not everybody wants to share their story, but there’s plenty of people out there that are willing to stand in front of a group of people and tell them what happened to them, so that when they’re sitting—it’s not going to hit everybody of course, but when there’s airmen out in the audience they’re looking at—it is a person that it’s affecting, and this is how it affected them.”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Female participants also suggested training could be improved by incorporating scenarios in which men are victims. Specifically, participants said they felt there should be more discussion surrounding the male perspective of being a victim. It was also suggested that men could potentially try to take on the role of a female victim in a scenario to understand the female perspective of assault. Participants indicated that they felt the idea of males being victims of a sexual assault is only slightly addressed in training. They stated male Service members may not seek services or make a report because they would be thought of as weak or inferior, therefore, they would not report to maintain the perception of being strong and able to fend off an attack.

“You don’t really have that for something as serious as sexual harassment or sexual assault, you don’t have the stories out there and then young men’s perception is ‘No, I can’t report that because my buddies are going to see me as inferior,’ or ‘It is not going to be taken seriously.’ You would hope it would change because you know it is happening but how do you change it? I don’t have the answer to that.” – **Army OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

“If you can reverse the stereotype onto the other gender, so if you have males, and you’re like, ‘Today, you’re going to be a female in this scenario, and I’m going to be a male. And I’m going to tell you what I’ve experienced, or make you feel what I’ve experienced.’ I think that will be a perspective reversal.” – **Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

The suggested improvements mentioned above were the most discussed by female participants. Other improvement opportunities communicated by Service members during the focus groups included allotted times for training, so Service members could plan around the training, a clearer definition of SAPR/SHARP, and how the program functions as a whole. Overall, participants indicated they would like training to be in smaller groups with engaging presenters and the trainings should have a tailored message fitting their rank or experience that acknowledge males as victims.

Leadership

Leadership has a powerful influence on gender dynamics in organizations and work groups (e.g., Sadler et al., 2017; DMDC, 2016). In order to fully understand the role of leadership in

preventing and responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment, it is first helpful to explore leadership as a more general concept. Below, we discuss how Service members in the focus groups defined leadership, who they see as leaders, and what constitutes constructive versus destructive leadership behavior. Subsequently, we discuss leaders' roles in issues related to sexual assault and sexual harassment.

When asked to discuss who is perceived as leadership on the installation, female participants generally first mentioned higher ranking Service members, such as chiefs, colonels, commanders, generals, and admirals. Even so, many female Service members in the sessions reported feeling that influential leadership could exist at all levels. In addition, female participants explained that persons who emerge as leaders may be dependent on the situation.

“Sometimes I find it’s a spectrum just because of how the mission is. Leadership can be your team chief, or it can be a crew member, or it can be a civilian you work with, or it can be you because it’s more of an adverb for a lot of people than an adjective. So I think a lot of us, we all are leaders in our own way.” – **Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Leading by example played a critical role in female participants' idea of formal leadership at their installation, particularly when discussing gender-related issues. Many participants reported believing that leaders must “walk the walk” and be a role model for those around them.

“My first mentor, he stressed the most important tool you have is your sailors, because a pump will only do whatever specifications it’s set to do, but your sailors can always grow. They can always be better...How [junior Service members] see you plays into that...if you come in and say, ‘We got Full Speed Ahead training we got to do. We’ll just find time,’ and you downplay its importance, [Sailors] automatically assume, ‘This isn’t that important.’ Whereas when you go like, ‘Hey, we have this really important training,’ and you stress, ‘This is why you need to learn this,’ it’s better for them to get on board with.” – **Navy OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Peer Leadership

Participants explained that local installation leadership and respected colleagues play a critical role in Service members' social and professional development as a military Service member. Some participants said they preferred to seek these individuals out for advice and mentorship, and felt more comfortable with these leaders than with individuals of a significantly higher rank.

“When you say policy, I think big Navy. I think there are leaders that are designated to set policy and ideally, that trickles down to the deckplate level. And we have a responsibility for upholding policy, but leaders aren’t by title or by collar devices. Leaders are people that you would naturally follow or listen to or seek out for guidance or mentorship or as a role model.”
– **Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Setting the Tone Related to Sexual Assault and Harassment Policy

When asked who sets the tone at their installation, participants explained that a variety of people contributed to the culture of an installation. Those participants who reported that immediate leadership, such as group and squadron commanders, are the most influential had mixed views on their leadership. Specifically, some participants reported feeling that immediate leadership does not set a consistent tone, but rather their messages vary based on mood or assignment, especially as it relates to sexual assault and sexual harassment policy. Other participants indicated that they felt junior enlisted members who carried out leadership's orders have a larger impact on installation culture.

Communication

At many OCONUS locations, female participants found that leadership's communication tactics with lower ranking Service members create a negative environment for female Service members. For example, they cited a lack of transparency and general distrust as key issues that characterize this negative environment when hoping to report or discuss sexual assault and harassment.

Lack of Transparency. Female Service members in the focus groups mentioned that there is a lack of transparency from leadership about the goings on at their installation, which creates a sense of secrecy and guile.

“Communication is so important...The problem is when you go to leadership, and you're asking questions and they tell you that, 'Oh, y'all don't ask questions,' but when we do ask questions, you don't have the answer. I call it the 'yes man' syndrome...We have a right to know what we're doing. Just because we volunteered to serve our country, it doesn't mean we should be treated as if we're not supposed to know.”

– **Army OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

Trust. Some female Service members in the sessions expressed distrust when communicating with their military leadership. Specifically, female participants said they believed that they would not be comfortable disclosing any information about sexual assault or sexual harassment to higher ranking Service members.

“I think all of it comes down to trust. I know me coming up, I would not talk to anybody in my chain of command. I absolutely would not. The reason being, I think they [showed] me they were not there to really assist me.”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Engagement in Prevention and Response Efforts

A key consensus among female participants was that leaders must lead by example by displaying commitment to preventing and ending sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military. Participants suggested ways in which leadership could demonstrate this commitment, including supporting training, willingness to discuss issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment, or

through swift action in response to offenses. Some participants recognized their senior leaders were engaging in these behaviors to support prevention efforts.

“I see more leaders or more high-ranking people coming out and supporting sexual assault events we have. At least at my command, they come out. And we try to get our higher-ups going out there, speak out, and make sure, like, ‘Hey, I’m here, too. You’re not just here. It’s not only my juniors. We’re here as well.’” – Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female

However, some participants disagreed, saying they believed many senior leaders do not set good examples for their peers and subordinates. Further, when asked what leaders do on installations to prevent sexual assault or sexual harassment, some participants detailed actions or sentiments that hamper the military’s efforts to prevent assault. Many participants communicated that leadership talks about prevention efforts, but sometimes takes actions that contradict this messaging. Major themes that emerged from the sessions included leadership having a dismissive attitude toward sexual assault and acceptance of inappropriate gender-related behavior.

Dismissive Attitude Toward Sexual Assault. Some female Service members in the sessions said leadership makes jokes about training or programming, which detracts from the seriousness of the topic. In a similar vein, some female participants said they felt that leadership does not take sexual assault or sexual harassment seriously, causing Service members to feel it is not a priority for the military.

“I hear it’s not tolerated a lot, but at the same time, the same commanders or the same leadership are also joking about it within closed doors or their close little group.” – Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female

“But a lot of times, at least in the past, my experiences have been it’s not something that people wanted to make a priority. It is a program we have, and it’s a yearly review, but it’s not necessarily an everyday topic that we talk about because it’s uncomfortable, and it’s not fun. And there’s, unfortunately, probably a lot more prevalence of it than we want to talk about.” – Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Female

Acceptance of Inappropriate Gender-Related Behavior. Many participants indicated that they believed that although leadership may discuss topics related to sexual assault and sexual harassment frequently, those discussions do not materialize into prevention-related actions. For example, leadership was described as being complicit in allowing inappropriate jokes and behavior to continue uncorrected. Female leaders in the sessions, in particular, voiced this sentiment, noting that leadership inadvertently normalizes inappropriate gender-related behavior by not punishing or correcting Service members who engage in such behavior.

“Right now it’s such a sound bite. It’s, ‘I have a zero-tolerance policy against sexual harassment and sexual assault, and I’m putting that on my

OER [Officer Evaluation Report]. It's meaningless. It's worthless. It has to be there. But the actual real support of that program really doesn't exist...Somebody saying, 'That was inappropriate.' The person that says that is usually a female, who then gets seen as some cold [expletive] that can't take a joke." – **Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

"I think they say zero tolerance, but when you're the only female in an all-male career field, and you have higher leaders talking about women in a derogatory way and talking about how the male Airmen are watching porn or something like that, it just makes it awkward. And you're hoping that somebody is going to say something, but they don't say anything." – **Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

"Something that I've noticed is because the men might get defensive, more people are starting to normalize them. They're not stopping any sort of victim blaming. They're not believing one side more than the other. But they're starting to normalize inappropriate situations with people who just exhibit these bad behaviors... They have immediate supervisors or NCO people that they look up to normalizing the situation for them." – **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Role of Officers and Senior Enlisted

Participants were asked about the role that different types of leaders, specifically officers and senior enlisted members, play in general and with respect to sexual assault and sexual harassment. Participants shared that these leaders may have a role in improving culture and promoting training.

Improve Culture

Many participants said they believed a major role of officers and senior enlisted members at their installation is to create a healthier culture and promote gender equality through their actions. This theme emerged during discussions around the general role of leadership, with a particular emphasis for shaping installation culture.

"It does start with that middle management. It's one, the people you see every day. So, your LPO [Leading Petty Officer], your work center sup, they're the ones who have to really push it because you see them the most every day." – **Navy OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

"They're ensuring that there's a level of fairness. So they're not giving really hard jobs to the men, and women get the admin jobs. And ensuring that they're never given an opportunity that there's animosity between genders... We're within a department that we're all on one team, and then

they're encouraged to support the command and the command's mission equally so that there's no resentment among genders."

– Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Female

Training

Service members in the focus groups were asked to describe their perceptions of officer and senior enlisted member responsibilities in prevention. Many in the focus groups reported feeling that these leadership responsibilities include leading training and educating junior Service members on sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention in the military. Participants communicated that officers and senior enlisted members have an especially important role in both conducting and promoting training on sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and response.

"The Chief is there to train the junior officers and to train the junior enlisted and to make sure that the standards are held at that level. That's part of their primary role in the Navy. And so, when you're talking about upholding the standards, it's not just the standards of doing work. It's the standards of what is acceptable behavior, and what is not acceptable behavior. If you've got a good Chief's mess, then you're going to have a good culture that doesn't tolerate [sexual harassment]. And it's all about people that we have in that role." – **Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Suggestions for Action

There was a general consensus among all participants that leaders could play a more active role in prevention efforts by "stepping up" to take action. Examples include stopping inappropriate comments when they are heard, taking reports of sexual assault and sexual harassment seriously, offering support to survivors, and punishing those found guilty. Many female participants reported feeling that their leaders are not playing a strong enough role in prevention, but through swift and forceful action, these leaders would be able to increase prevention efforts.

"Let's say someone makes a comment that's a little sexual, and your staff NCO says, 'Hey, maybe we shouldn't make comments like that,' even before a sexual assault or harassment even occurs. Just establishing the environment I guess you could say. If someone says something, and then your staff NCO, 'Hey, maybe we shouldn't talk about that.' And then other Marines see that then they're like, 'Oh, we shouldn't be discussing things like that around certain people or out loud like that.' And I think that establishes an environment that it's not acceptable to talk about things like that in front of other people." – **Marine Corps CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

"I feel like initially there's this puff of smoke or the steam to where [Senior leadership is taking a sexual assault or harassment report] seriously. This

person's going to be held accountable. And then you don't hear anything more about it. You're kind of left frustrated... And then it's almost like they hope everyone else is going to forget about it too."

– **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

General Perceptions of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Participants were asked about a wide range of topics about sexual assault and sexual harassment at their installation and in their Service. Topics of interest included general perception and understanding of sexual assault and sexual harassment, the form both behaviors can take, gender differences in both behaviors, situations in which people are at risk for sexual assault or sexual harassment, and prevention.

Defining Sexual Assault

Female participants had a clear understanding of the definition of sexual assault. Most participants viewed it as unexpected or undesired physical contact. Participants indicated feeling that sexual assault is comprised of a range of behaviors, such as exposing private body parts, touching private body parts, attempted rape, and rape, and it is considered a clearly definable event.

"I think a lot of female [Service members], and male [Service members], for that kind of matter, know the definition of sexual harassment and sexual assault, and they know the difference. One is hands on and one is verbal."

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Defining Sexual Harassment

Throughout the focus groups, sexual harassment was an ongoing area of confusion for Service members. Similar to male participants, female participants said they believed that behaviors constituting sexual harassment varied based on the level of intensity, personal opinion, and background. What constitutes sexual harassment was largely perceived to be open to interpretation—what may be sexual harassment to one person may not be to another person.

"Anything could be taken as sexual harassment. Any small, little thing could be taken as sexual harassment because everybody's so different, everybody grew up different; everybody is offended by different things."

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

Form Sexual Harassment Takes

Female Service member participants explained that sexual harassment can take both verbal and physical forms. One common form noted by participants was jokes that “go too far” and are interpreted by others as offensive even if the joke was not intended to offend. Additionally,

female Service member participants reported believing that some forms of unwanted touching also constitute sexual harassment.

“I think it varies because the way that my work center works, we’re really close with each other. So sometimes I feel like a lot of the things that happens could be considered sexual harassment, but we don’t portray it like that. But if someone else that was completely new—I think that’s what’s happened in the past, is if someone brand new comes in and they don’t know how to take it, they don’t realize we’re joking, then they’re just, ‘This is making me uncomfortable... and this is the type of things I should report.’ But when, for us, it’s like a day-to-day thing. We’re really just comfortable with each other. So I don’t know. Sexual harassment can be something little, from just a joke. But it can be up to where it’s that one person that keeps trying to make advances on someone. And if the other person is like, ‘Oh, yeah, okay,’ like it’s a joke, ‘Ha, ha, ha,’ but someone else can look at it and be like, ‘This person is continuously touching their leg or something like that. That’s not right.’ But it depends because my work center is close. But I don’t know how it works for everybody else.”

– Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female

Sexual Harassment

Most female participants indicated they routinely witness behaviors that may lead to or be considered sexual harassment in the form of inappropriate touching, comments, or jokes, and noted that they have become accustomed to these behaviors and, therefore, would choose to not report such instances. Some female participants indicated that they believed that their male colleagues view these inappropriate behaviors as jokes and do not realize that they can be perceived as sexual harassment.

“It’s not seen as serious or, ‘Wow, you’re being overdramatic about the way he groped you or the things she said to you. You’re being overdramatic, that’s not sexual harassment.’ As opposed to sexual assault, it’s like, ‘Oh, don’t do that anymore.’” – Air Force CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female

“I think with harassment, it might actually be even less likely to be reported because there’s very often little to no evidence unless there’s an e-mail chain, or a text chain, or something like that. And then so the, ‘Why bother?’ Or, ‘Everyone’s going to side with him,’ especially if it comes down to trying to do character witnesses versus character witnesses... with ASIST [Applied Suicide Intervention Skills] training, how the sergeant major talked about, ‘And this is what I went through.’ But you don’t hear that for assault. It reminded me that I’ve heard many senior women officers speak, or write in

their biographies, or whatever, and almost all of them have some instance of harassment they've experienced growing up. And you just deal with it type of attitude. So even if it's the, 'Well, why bother reporting it?' I'm sure there's also a good bit of the, 'I can handle this myself.' Get over it type of thing. Or just become a little more jaded."

– **Army OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Gender Differences on Sexual Assault and Harassment

Across the installations, female participants mentioned that there are many differences between gender regarding how sexual assault and sexual harassment are discussed and perceived. Participants explained that some of these differences are deeply rooted in gender dynamics; for example, many female participants stated that they are more likely to perceive unwanted situations (e.g., inappropriate jokes) as sexual harassment compared to their male colleagues. In addition, they indicated that male Service members are less likely to recognize themselves as victims of sexual assault or sexual harassment. Potential reasons for this discrepancy included male Service members' believing that sexual assault or sexual harassment happens only to women and a fear of being seen as weak.

"I feel like, and this also depends on the person as well, but a male might not take it, if they give you a pat on the back or whatever, a male might take it as [sexual harassment], but maybe that female might—something could have happened to her, and then that doesn't feel that way and they were like, 'Well, it wasn't sexual harassment,' or, 'It wasn't this.' And the female might feel that way, it was. So there's always the different views of stuff."

– **Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

"I think part of that, too, is if the generations going down teaching them like, 'Oh, the females are just always crying,' and they get taught that, when it happens to them, now they feel like they can't speak up because it's like, 'Oh no, no, no. I don't want to be on the other side.' Not to say that it makes that seem like we're the enemy, but they put us in two categories. And when it happens to them, because of how they were brought up, now they don't want to speak up because they've been always taught to be on this side, not over here. So I think that may be an issue for male brains, where now they feel, 'Oh, this is just a female issue. It doesn't happen to us.' Now they feel like they can't speak up." – **Marine Corps OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Risky Situations

Numerous female Service members in the focus groups agreed that high-risk situations for sexual assault often involve alcohol. They also indicated that the risk becomes even greater when female Service members do not have a same-sex buddy for protection when going out, or

when they are drinking with a member of the opposite sex. At the OCONUS Army installation, several female Service member participants were more likely to claim risky situations involving walking alone at night, as many areas were not well lit, and walking outside to use the restrooms; this was a dry installation and therefore risk was interpreted under different circumstances.

“So I would say a high-risk situation would look like probably bars, party. Alcohol is involved. Plans are just changing. You don’t have defined roles, as in ‘Okay, this person is not going to drink. This person is going to keep eyes out. This is where we’re going to meet up afterwards.’ So plans have not even been planned, or falling apart in the midst of it. And you mix sexes with drinks, things can typically happen.”

– **Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

“At least put the females in the bays that are closest to the female latrines. I mean, I am two tents down and two tents back from the latrines. So it’s not that far. But there are three male bays that I get to walk by and three male latrines. And it’s bad enough that we got to walk to go take a shower anyway. But now we have to walk in the dark. They should definitely have more lights. I mean, you have lights on each end of the path, but there’s none in between. You got these big old generators and air conditionings that you can stand five or six people behind them and not see them, especially in the dark. So, it’s just asking for something to happen.”

– **Army OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

Alcohol and Consent

Female participants reported that when alcohol is involved, judgment is impaired, which may impact whether individuals self-select into risky situations that might escalate to sexual assault. They said they felt that once a certain amount of alcohol is involved, a person loses his or her ability to consent. Additionally, female participants said they believed that when Service members drink, it gives them “liquid courage” to say or do things they would not normally engage in, and as a result, some Service members might use this opportunity to take advantage of their colleagues.

“The chances. That’s opportunity. You already know, ‘Oh, I’ve seen you have about four beers in you. You should start to be getting on a good level. Okay, let me just go ahead and talk. Let me talk all smooth to you. Oh, you look pretty. You [were] running real fast out there. Look at that kick.’ And then next thing I know, I make you feel all good, and then I could potentially have a chance to get in your pants. And I feel like as a man, as anyone, liquid courage, basically. Liquid courage is going to let you be able to say the deepest, darkest thoughts. It’s going to come forth, and then the right

person, or the wrong person I really should say, if they not necessarily thinking correctly, that's the chance right there. That's the opportunity to take advantage of someone.” – Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female

Prevention of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Only Service members in the focus groups at Air Force and Marine Corps installations discussed official prevention efforts against sexual assault and harassment, specifically “Green Dot” training. These members shared mixed feelings: specifically, some female Service member participants indicated that they felt the training was helpful, whereas other participants believed attending the training was bothersome.

“[Green Dot] breaks it down clearly, like, all right. This is good. This is bad. This is what we're shooting for with a proactive Green Dot, and then also that if you can't intervene, it's okay that you can't, and these are the reasons why you might not be able to, but here are some ways to go around it. I think it just gives more options. It's like it's okay if you can't always intervene in this situation, but if you know to call someone else that could step in, it would help out.” –Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female

Bystander Intervention

Female Service members in the sessions were asked about their perceptions of bystander intervention as a means of preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment, including the role of leadership in encouraging bystander intervention, characteristics of those who intervene, and barriers to stepping in to stop an at-risk situation from escalating.

General Perceptions of Bystander Intervention

Female Service members in the focus groups consistently emphasized bystander intervention as the principal method of preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment. Participants repeatedly stated that military leadership has an obligation to encourage Service members to intervene in high-risk situations and to model the behavior that they want to instill in Service members. Female focus group participants were mixed in their perception of whether their fellow Service members would intervene in a situation involving unwanted gender-related behaviors, but indicated they felt that for the most part if people chose to intervene, they would be regarded positively for their actions.

Leadership's Role

Female Service members in the focus groups were emphatic about the role of leadership in educating and encouraging subordinates to take action in preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment through bystander intervention. Female leaders (i.e., senior enlisted and junior/senior officer participants), in turn, viewed themselves and fellow male leaders as role models whose responsibility it is to act to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment whenever

possible. Further, they expressed a desire to tailor trainings on bystander intervention to the audience. They suggested simplifying messaging regarding bystander intervention in order to make it easier to understand and implement for the youngest Service members. This could involve providing more concrete examples from their everyday lives, rather than appealing to esoteric ideals that might be less likely to hit home. Fellow female leaders pointed out that Service members have a duty to watch out for one another and could be considered negligent by not doing so; several said that they actively tell their subordinates that any sexual harassment or sexual assault that occurs on their watch is their responsibility and reflects negatively on all of them.

“If we give them the tools to be able to intervene in almost a joking way...not that it’s a lighthearted thing, but it’s probably a social situation. It’s probably a party. They’re probably drinking...if we teach Marines there’s a way to do this delicately, like, ‘These are the lines that you can use,’ and break it down that way. Getting to the honor, courage, commitment would be helpful but those ideas I think are really hard for that 18, 19-year-old to articulate.” – **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

“It’s going to come down to what you’re comfortable with. But at the end of the day, I think everyone has a responsibility to not just be that innocent bystander but to take action whether it’s at that time or reporting it later, just doing something.” – **Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Perceptions of Bystander Intervention

Female focus group participants were asked to discuss characteristics of those who intervene and situations that might make bystander intervention more or less likely. Participants talked about inherent qualities like a person’s morals and personality as being important predictors of whether they will be likely to intervene in an at-risk situation. They also cited the military core principles of courage and duty to fellow Service members as being important shared values that might encourage Service members to intervene. Participants said most Service members should feel comfortable intervening, although they noted in some cases bystander intervention is rare. Some expressed that Service members would be more likely to intervene in a situation perceived as more serious, like sexual assault, than a situation perceived as less serious, like sexual harassment.

“A lot of it has to do with the personality of the [Service member]. So if it’s someone who’s observing it, if it’s a person that’s going to intervene, then they will.” – **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

“If you’re a Marine or in the military, I got your back...it should be like that for anybody. If they see another military member in a tough situation or an iffy situation, it’s better to intervene and then get [yelled] at Monday morning then to not intervene and then hear about a charge that came down.”
– **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

“I’ve never had anybody step in and say anything...as far as harassment goes. But...I’m almost 100% sure that if we saw someone getting assaulted, that would be a different story than being harassed.”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Some participants said it was their belief that fellow female Service members are more likely than their male counterparts to step in to help in an at-risk situation. They speculated that female Service members tend to be more in tune with their female counterparts and are more likely to recognize certain at-risk situations, particularly sexual harassment. On the other hand, participants indicated believing that male Service members may be completely oblivious to the problem, or alternatively, hesitate to intervene in these situations because they may fear misreading the situation and making a woman uncomfortable by stepping in unnecessarily.

“I see a lot of women stepping in and saying things, but I don’t see a lot of men stepping in and saying things about it. I feel a lot of women are empowered to help other women, but I don’t know that men feel empowered to help women. Not to be men-bashing because that’s not what it is at all.”

– **Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Barriers to Intervening

Female Service members in the focus groups were asked about factors that might prevent others from intervening. Participants cited several potential obstacles, including backlash toward bystanders, fear of getting others in trouble, discomfort getting involved with unknown persons or concern about misinterpreting complex circumstances, rank differential between the accused and bystander, sexual harassment-specific barriers, and worry about getting in trouble for one’s own misconduct.

Possible Backlash Toward Those Who Intervene

Female focus group participants stated that although they would like to think that bystanders who intervene would consistently be celebrated for taking action, they felt it possible that in some cases intervention would be interpreted as getting involved in business that is not theirs or, more maliciously, being a “rat” and attempting to get someone in trouble.

“I think if it was welcomed and warranted, then they would be lauded. Their friends would be happy to know that they’ve got someone on their side like that. But if it was an overreaction or if even it wasn’t an overreaction, but it ended up being an embarrassing situation for anyone, maybe they would just make fun of them and stop being [their friend].”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

“For some people, it could be like, ‘Oh, he’s a hero now.’ ...You intervened and you stopped it. Or it could be like, ‘Oh, you’re a snitch.’ He can be

looked at as a bad person for trying to interrupt it, depending on who's looking at him.” – Navy OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female

Fear of Getting Others in Trouble

Some female Service members in the sessions talked about a fear of getting fellow Service members in trouble as a potential barrier to intervening in cases of sexual assault and sexual harassment. They said if they are friendly with the alleged perpetrator, they may not want to get involved because of a sense of loyalty to the friend. More generally, participants posited that the sense of camaraderie among Service members, while on the one hand encourages people to intervene to protect each other, can sometimes serve as an impediment to intervention, since some Service members may view such intervention as a violation of loyalty and trust between members. For these Service members, intervening may be seen as a direct betrayal.

“What if it’s their friend that’s the offender? And they’re just like, ‘Oh, I don’t want to get them in trouble. Let me act like I didn’t see this.’”
– Navy OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female

Discomfort Getting Involved with Unknown Persons or Complex Situations

Some female participants said that one major barrier to intervening is the discomfort people feel inserting themselves in what they perceive as other people’s affairs. In such situations, the outcome of intervention is unknown and could very well be negative. In addition, some participants indicated they would prefer to avoid potentially dangerous or complicated situations because it is in their best interest not to get involved. For example, someone may choose not to intervene to avoid involvement in a potentially lengthy and cumbersome investigative process.

“[They] just don’t care. Like, ‘It’s not me. It’s none of my business.’ They just don’t want to be involved with the investigation and everything.”
– Navy OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female

“Other people don’t want to step in where things—either they’re overreacting, or they’re imagining a situation or maybe misinterpreting a situation.” – Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female

Further, participants indicated situations can be complicated by whether a Service member knows the people involved, whether the observer is consuming alcohol, and additional circumstances such as the relationship of the people being observed—all of which can reduce the likelihood of intervening. If the Service member knows the people involved, participants suggested he or she might be less biased in reading the signs and overlook an at-risk situation. Similarly, if the two people are in a relationship, there was a perception from the participants that the bystander may dismiss behaviors they might otherwise see as inappropriate. Likewise, participants indicated alcohol consumption can lead to fuzzy thinking and make a Service member less observant than they would be under normal conditions. Others indicated Service members might be worried about making a judgement call and being wrong. Additionally, they

might be worried about inserting themselves into an altercation and putting their own safety at risk. Finally, they may simply not think that involving themselves is worth any potential fallout.

“When you’re drunk and you’re not thinking clearly, you don’t necessarily notice the signs...you don’t pay attention to anything or anyone else around you.” – **Air Force CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

“It’s a fine line as a bystander watching somebody else from across the bar. You don’t know their previous relationship. You don’t know how they are. You don’t want to feel like a [expletive], like, ‘Yo, back off.’ And they say, ‘That’s my girlfriend.’” – **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

“I imagine another way to muddy the waters is if you or the people around you knew that those two people had a potential relationship already, maybe even a husband and wife, or a girlfriend, boyfriend, because there could absolutely be sexual assault there as well. You’re inclined, perhaps, to give them more leeway maybe than you were if you were in a bar and it was complete strangers that were acting that same way.”
– **Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Rank Differential Between Bystander and Accused

Many female participants reported believing that if the alleged perpetrator is of a higher rank than the bystander, the bystander may not feel comfortable intervening to stop the situation. Service members are taught to respect and look up to their superiors; therefore, intervening and expressing disapproval of a superior’s behavior is at odds with military doctrine. It was discussed that the power differential between ranks may also make Service members feel intimidated and concerned they would not be listened to or believed if they accuse someone of a higher rank. They also may worry about negative career impact as a result of intervening and exposing the misconduct of a senior Service member.

“Throw in rank, and that’s a whole other issue that you were trying to address as well. When it’s peer to peer, they may feel a little bit more empowered to say something but if you have a predator that is superior ranking to you [you may feel less comfortable speaking up].”
– **Air Force CONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

“If I see leadership, I see my Sergeant Major or Colonel or somebody doing something inappropriate...depending on my level or rank...the intimidation factor goes into that too, it’ll just be like, ‘Okay.’...[it’s] easier to correct battle buddies [because] we’re the same rank.”
– **Army OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

Fear of Punishment for Misconduct

Some female participants said that the fear of getting in trouble for a secondary offense (e.g., underage drinking, fraternization) that they might be committing while observing an at-risk situation could prevent them from stepping in to intervene. This can pose a challenge for Service members who want to help their peers but worry about the consequences of intervening and launching an investigation which could reveal their own misconduct.

“[They might be less likely to intervene or report sexual assault] if they were doing something illegal. If [they witness] sexual assault and they’re underage drinking, they may not want to go and tell whoever and be like, ‘Hey, this just happened.’ ‘Oh, what were you doing?’ ‘Oh, I was in my room drinking,’ or ‘Oh, hey, you smell like alcohol. How old are you?’”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Sexual Harassment-Specific Barriers

Female Service members in the sessions stated that there are several reasons why their fellow Service members might be less likely to intervene in cases of sexual harassment. First, participants said that there is confusion regarding what behaviors constitute sexual harassment and the fact that it is partly based on the perception of the person being harassed, which makes it difficult to recognize for the bystander. Second, some people are dismissive of sexual harassment or perceive it as less serious than sexual assault, so a bystander might not believe a situation merits stepping in. Finally, female participants said that they have been conditioned to accept sexual harassment as a consequence of working in a traditionally male-dominated environment, so in many cases, they have become accustomed to witnessing inappropriate behavior.

“Most of the time [someone] wouldn’t intervene if [guys are] talking about a girl saying, ‘Oh, she’s hot,’ or, ‘I’m going to try to get that.’ They’d probably think it’s funny or it’s a joke.”

– **Navy CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

“[For example] jokes about women in our profession...I would just think ‘You’re an idiot.’...[But] other people would absolutely consider [that] to be harassment...Again, you’re kind of an idiot, but I would not think that I needed to stop you in your tracks and say that is an inappropriate comment. So things like that that I just probably let roll off my back and I assume that it’s because I’ve had to be in a club of boys.”

– **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Reporting

Female Service member participants were asked about their general perceptions on reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment, including attitudes toward people who report, perceived gender differences as they relate to reporting, and their perceptions of the reporting process.

They were also asked to discuss perceived barriers to reporting and perceived retaliation for reporting.

General Perceptions of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Reporting

In general, female Service member participants agreed with their male counterparts that the military provides an environment supportive toward reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment and that leadership at installations encourage such reporting. Most female participants also said there are sufficient training and resources for reporting, but there were some who reported that they felt military leadership does not always take cases of sexual assault or sexual harassment seriously, which sends mixed messages to those who might consider reporting. Female participants said they are more likely than males to have a positive attitude toward Service members who choose to report. Most female participants said they would support someone who chooses to report, but they often hear negative comments from their male colleagues about those who report incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Female Service member participants asserted that these negative attitudes can reduce women's likelihood to report these sexual assault and sexual harassment. Finally, participants indicated that they felt the reporting processes for sexual assault and sexual harassment are generally good and have improved over time, but they pointed out a few ways the process could be improved to encourage victims to report.

Attitudes Toward People Who Report

Regarding attitudes toward reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment, female Service member participants were almost universally positive in saying that reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment is important because it can help prevent someone from harming others and can encourage fellow Service members to speak up when they experience a similar situation. Participants also said reporting is more widely accepted than it has been in the past; they now see younger and more junior people coming forward to report. However, they said a stigma still exists regarding those who report, and they indicated believing that it comes predominantly from male Service members. Participants stated male Service members are much more likely to make a negative attribution toward the accuser, such as concluding that women who report are overreacting, trying to get someone in trouble, or making up an incident for self-gain. Some focus group participants speculated that the male-dominated environment of the military fosters a "boys' club" mentality in which reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment is viewed as a betrayal and reporters are seen as "tattletales." Indeed, reporting sexual assault or harassment disrupts harmonious relationships between Service members and can, thus, result in the reporter suffering repercussions such as being dismissed as unreliable or labeled a troublemaker. Female Service member participants also said that although they have had mostly positive responses from senior leadership regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment reporting, they have also witnessed reactions that communicated a leader did not want to hear a report or doubted the veracity of the claims. Most female Service member participants acknowledged that reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment opens victims up to potential social and career consequences (which will be discussed further later in this section), and therefore, they tend to view reporting as an act of courage and strength.

“I’ve always respected people that reported it, and I’ve always felt the chain of command did the right thing in the circumstances that I was aware of.”

– Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Female

“If you go and you talk to your leadership about it, and they just make it out to be a joke. Like, ‘Oh, you’re being too sensitive.’”

– Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female

“[It’s] not my attitude, but I think there is still some of that [attitude of] ‘she’s just crying wolf’ or... ‘she just changed her mind afterwards’ ...out there.” – Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female

Gender Differences in Reporting

Female focus group participants discussed some themes regarding differences between women and men in their perceptions of sexual assault and sexual harassment, which might also lead to differences in reporting. First, as discussed previously, participants indicated that male Service members tend to be skeptical when it comes to females reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment. At the same time, male Service members tend to look down on fellow males who report (this topic will be discussed later in the section). Female Service member participants, on the other hand, claimed to be more supportive of victims who choose to report, regardless of gender. However, both male and female participants indicated experiencing pressure to fit into the male-dominated military culture and, therefore, may avoid reporting so as not to incur negative repercussions. Further, many female Service member participants indicated that joking around in a sexually explicit or otherwise insensitive way is generally acceptable in the military. Female Service members in the focus groups said they often try to play along and be one of the guys in these situations, so as not to rock the boat, but they described that other women may interpret the same behaviors as sexual harassment. Female participants cited this type of scenario as one reason why they believe more sexual harassment cases are reported by women.

“If a man reports it versus a woman....[the] women are [seen as] overreacting, they’re [emotional], they’re crying wolf or this didn’t really happen, or [they’re] mad at that person because of some other issue...For men, I would assume that they might consider that they are being taken advantage of or would appear as weak.”

– Air Force CONUS, Senior Officer, Female

“I feel like [as a woman] you want to try and fit in as much as [you] can so you might just let things slide because you’re in this male environment and [want to be part of the group], so you’re looking for any way to bond. So when that whole masculine, men be[ing] men [thing happens], you’re going to probably not say anything because you don’t want to be that girl.”

– Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Female

Reporting and Investigation Process

For the most part, female Service member participants agreed the procedures for reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment are clear and there are sufficient resources for those who need help. They also noted that over the last four to five years, the process has improved such that there are more victim advocates, greater support from the chain of command and senior leadership, and more resources overall. However, some focus group participants stated that changes to the reporting system have created some confusion, particularly as they relate to restricted versus unrestricted reporting. Another concern about these changes was an inconsistency across levels of leadership in support for reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment: participants suggested that leaders need to do a better job of presenting a united front to make potential accusers feel that leadership has their back. Similarly, participants said it is the responsibility of leadership to normalize reporting and to communicate to Service members that although there may be difficulties, reporting an incident may allow a victim to obtain justice, protect fellow Service members, and motivate others to stand up for themselves. Finally, participants stated that it is important to ensure there are enough qualified senior female leaders with whom one could discuss cases of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Participants communicated that senior female Service members would be preferred to male senior Service members because of increased perceptions of perspective-taking ability (because women are more likely to be victims) and trustworthiness.

“It is very clear now. I mean, you see it everywhere you go, in every command, in every building. [Here’s] the procedure. Here’s who to call, and here are all the helplines.’ I mean, I feel very comfortable. If something were to happen today, I would know exactly what to do.”

– Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Female

“It’s confusing... I wouldn’t know what to do because we’ve changed...who is unrestricted and who is restricted I don’t know how many times since it’s all started, and I can’t get it straight. I would have to carry a chart with me to figure out where I can and can’t go.”

– Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female

“[Leadership should] let them know that once they report, nothing’s going to change. They’ll always have somebody to come to and talk to. And they won’t have to be afraid, thinking that everybody’s going to turn their back against them...they should assure that person that they’ll still have somebody there for them that they could come to and confide in whenever there’s an issue.” – Navy CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female

False Reporting

As with male Service member participants, the subject of “false reporting” of sexual assault and sexual harassment came up repeatedly among female Service member participants. However, the perspective and tone of these conversations were very different. For the most part, female

participants indicated that they did not believe false reporting occurred. On the contrary, they said they thought male Service members are responsible for perpetuating the illusion that false reporting is a common occurrence. Female Service member participants indicated that this creates a stigma around reporting and reduces a victim's likelihood to report. This perception was most prevalent among junior enlisted female participants at the OCONUS Air Force and Marine Corps locations. These participants asserted that male military leaders at all levels give lip service on the importance of reporting sexual assault and harassment, but some participants indicated witnessing behaviors by leadership that highlighted that negative attitudes about reporting are deep-seated among those who are charged with setting the tone for handling sexual misconduct in the military environment.

Other female participants described what they interpreted as potential backlash to an increased emphasis on reporting. Participants reported believing that there is an assumption by military members that it is "too easy" to report allegations of sexual assault and that alleged victims are being overly protected by the military. As a result of this belief, participants said they felt people would be more likely to report very minor infractions or to make up stories for attention, retribution, or similar self-serving reasons. Participants talked about an ingrained mindset among male Service members in which they interpret observations in such a way as to fit the notion of false reporting. For example, male participants noted that a pervading belief exists that their female counterparts frequently file false reports of sexual assault and sexual harassment, resulting in innocent men being prosecuted. At the same time, these same men cited the extremely low conviction rate for charges of sexual harassment and sexual assault as proof that all such cases were fabricated by supposed victims. Female participants further argued that this confirmation bias is readily apparent in the stories circulated among Service members regarding reports of sexual assault and sexual harassment. These participants said they frequently hear men talk about situations in which they heard about a woman filing a false report, yet most of these stories—according to female participants—are not based on firsthand experiences and are grossly exaggerated. Participants asserted that this phenomenon is highly detrimental to a healthy gender-related climate because it demeans women by making them appear less credible, underestimates the severity of the problem by rejecting the valid cases of sexual assault and sexual harassment, and makes it less likely that women, in particular, will come forward to report these incidents. Participants recognized that false reports may occur, but female participants indicated a belief that this occurs at a much lower rate than male participants, and maintained it is more unjust to invalidate legitimate grievances.

"This base hasn't been as bad [as others], but I've noticed [a similar] overall vibe...I had a[n] experience where someone came in and he was talking about, 'Oh, I couldn't PCS because this chick called sexual assault, false accusations,' and everyone was just quiet and not saying anything. And, that's just the vibe, no one takes it really seriously...of course, you have to say you take it seriously. But I think in more male-dominant fields it's like, 'Well, she has to be lying because there's no way.'"

– Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female

"You look at the upcoming [sexual assault] court-martials...People who are like, 'Oh, she lied and she got him for assault.' ...But if you look at [the

results], 95% are acquitted. And you're like, 'Hmm, so where are all these girls who are lying sending guys to jail?' ... When someone gets robbed, you're not like, 'Well maybe he's lying about it.' No one does that, but for some reason sexual assault is different. Everybody talks about those stories of, 'Oh, I heard about this one girl who made it all up, and she got [an] expedited transfer and all these other nice things and then it came out in the end that she made it all up.' I mean, that's probably like one in 100,000 cases...It's probably one person and they all heard about [it]. And then they all talk about it like it happens all the time.'

– **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Barriers to Reporting

A number of female participants said they felt that sexual assault and sexual harassment are underreported. When asked about barriers to reporting, female Service members in the sessions cited complex circumstances, the arduous investigation process, lack of privacy associated with the investigation, fear of social retribution or professional reprisal, issues around being a male victim, and sexual harassment-specific barriers.

Complex Circumstances

Some female Service member participants talked about complex and extenuating circumstances as being potential barriers to reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment. They referred to situations in which one or both of the persons involved have consumed alcohol and said that the presence of alcohol can make the situation difficult to interpret because consent is less clear, particularly with regards to incidents of sexual assault. As a result, those who have been sexually assaulted may be reluctant to report it, either because they cannot recall whether they consented or because they feel responsible for allowing themselves to drink to the point of not being able to make a clear-headed decision. So too, if the victim had an existing relationship with the assailant, whether as a friend or colleague, participants stated they might not report because they feel they led that person on or would be inclined to forgive inappropriate behavior from someone they know.

“[They might be less likely to report] if the person that's committing the [harassment]...is also a friend of theirs.”

– **Navy OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

“I don't know if it's ever an easy choice for anybody to decide, 'Yes, I'm going to go report this' ...especially with [incidents involving] alcohol, I think it's probably a little bit harder...When I think of sexual assault [without] alcohol, I just think of horrible, one-off chances that you're walking down a dark alley and [someone] comes up and attacks you, and so I think that would be a different instance. I [also] think when [the alleged perpetrator] is [someone] that you know...I think that plays a part in your decision to report.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Investigation Process

When asked about barriers to reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment, some female Service member participants cited the investigation process as a whole to be a key obstacle. Participants maintained the process is unduly lengthy and burdensome and typically results in no conviction or serious repercussions for the accused. Further, they argued the process exposes victims to loss of privacy.

Arduous Process. Female focus group participants indicated that the investigation process for reports of sexual assault and sexual harassment is extremely lengthy and time consuming and also takes a severe emotional toll on victims. Some described that each stage of the investigation can take many months and those involved must put their lives on hold for the duration of the process. Further, accusers in many cases are transferred to a new location, which can be particularly traumatic at a time when they most need the support of those close to them. Service member participants stated that victims may be much less likely to report when they consider the potentially long and painful process ahead of them, and they also noted that victims might feel the accused will be not be convicted and, at best, will receive a minor punishment.

“It’s usually the victim is the one that’s forced to relocate, which isn’t good for the victim’s mental well-being because they’re being ripped away from their support group that they’ve built and they have to rebuild a new one.”
– **Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

“The military process takes so bloody long. And it’s months and months of these people’s lives, where you’re constantly talking to people. And it’s a miserable, contentious environment.”
– **Army OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

“Here, it’s like, ‘Give it two years while we do our investigation.’ And it usually comes back to, ‘There wasn’t enough solid evidence and you’re still stuck here in the same everyday day to day.’”
– **Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

Lack of Privacy. Some female Service members in the focus groups reported that the loss of privacy, particularly for unrestricted reports, associated with the reporting and investigation process could deter people from reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment. Participants claimed this issue of privacy is exacerbated by the military environment in which information travels fast via gossip. Service member participants said they would not want their peers to know the details about what happened; they would be embarrassed and concerned people would not see them the same way or they would forever be associated with the event. Further, Service members in the focus groups also said that when information leaks out, it is often misleading or untrue; Service members would have little control over what and how their personal information is released, so they might feel frustrated or powerless to prevent negative repercussions.

“That’s why some people don’t report—because then your business is totally public. And if you have a friend in that situation, and you don’t want to force

them to report because you don't want to put them through that if they're not willing. It's a lot of personal information to your peers or your supervisors."

– **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

"[Say] somebody reports and it's unrestricted, and there are X number of people that are supposed to know that really have to know to make these decisions. But then, the Soldier's squad leader has to be involved...And then, the platoon sergeant has to know what's going on. And then, the platoon leader has to know. And the company commander has to know. And then, the first sergeant has to know. And it's this whole big shared thing instead of that little, tiny list of people that absolutely have to know."

– **Army OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Fear of Alleged Retaliation

Female focus group participants were asked whether fear of retaliation for reporting, either social or professional, would prevent Service members from reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment. Participants universally agreed that fear of retaliation would be the primary concern and potential deterrent for reporting.

Reputation. Female Service member participants argued that one method of social retaliation—damage to one's reputation—can be a powerful motivator against reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment, since it can follow someone for the length of his or her military career. Participants stated that Service members who report might be judged harshly and seen as “ratting others out,” not being a team player, exaggerating events, or simply lying. Further, they said the stigma of simply being associated with a sexual assault incident can negatively impact a person's reputation.

"If you report, you're maybe judged by your peers and your squad members [as a] liar or they may take sides or assume, [of the perpetrator], 'There's no way he or she could do that.'" – **Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

"You just don't want your reputation to be ruined...that's a really personal thing to have to put out in front of everyone. And even if 95% of the people are supportive of that, the 5% that aren't are spreading rumors about you. And typically, a victim's taken off the ships, [and] you don't have a chance to come back." – **Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

"[The perception is that] something is wrong with them. They're weak. I can see how someone could be embarrassed to share because then everyone looks at that person, and for the rest of the time that they are working with them, in the back of their mind, they're always going to be like, 'I don't like that person. This happened to them.'"

– **Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Victim Blaming. Female Service member participants agreed that victim blaming is a huge problem in the military and is likely a factor in victims' decisions not to report incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Female participants said those who experience sexual assault or sexual harassment are frequently blamed for bringing the behaviors onto themselves. Victim blaming can take multiple forms; all are potentially capable of harming a Service member's reputation. For example, participants indicated victims may be told they are at fault for making themselves vulnerable (e.g., drinking in excess, walking down a street late at night), or they may be criticized for behaving in a way that led to the assault or harassment (e.g., flirting, dancing, clothing choice).

“[Regarding] sexual harassment...I know this [scenario] has happened to a lot of female friends of mine, and it's happened to me. When it first happens, you're just so in shock and you don't know how to react, so you try to laugh it off, and people will see you laughing it off, and they'll take that as a clue that [you're] fine with it. And then it continues and you finally reach a point where it is actually unacceptable. This is really uncomfortable. [You] don't feel safe. And then, you report it but [people question], 'Hey, you laughed it off one, two, three times. Why are you reporting it now?' Just because you laughed it off and didn't say anything [previously], that must have meant that you thought it was okay...[And you're thinking to yourself], 'Am I taking this too seriously? Do I need to doubt myself? Can I [say I'm] uncomfortable in this situation?' You just aren't sure.”

– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

“I think a big problem, why most people don't want to report anything, is victim blaming...People automatically turn to the victim and say, 'You're the problem, Soldier.' No one will say anything about the...perpetrator. But they all turn to the victim and say, 'Oh, because you went out, you did this, you did that.' And people always [assume] that you're a slut or a whore. It doesn't matter what happened.”

– **Army OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Fitting In. When discussing whether Service members might retaliate against someone who reports sexual assault or sexual harassment, female participants asserted that the fear of ostracism or retaliation through social isolation by various means is a central barrier to reporting. Specifically, fitting in is a powerful driving force for Service members because the military culture promotes strong norms for unit cohesion and acceptance by peers. Service member participants across the four Services reported witnessing cases of ostracism in response to reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment. They provided examples, including talking negatively behind someone's back, ignoring alleged victims in person and on social media, excluding them from social events, and other behaviors that made the person feel alone or rejected.

“You're treated completely differently... [People might say] 'Don't hang out with her'...you end up getting ostracized and you're off in the corner. You're alone all the time.” – **Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

“You can be ostracized. If you said you were sexually assaulted by the most popular guy on the ship, everyone’s going to be like, ‘No. There’s no way he did it.’ ...all of a sudden everybody says, ‘Nobody talk to so-and-so, she’s going to lie and say, that this is what happened to her.’ It would suck for a sailor on a ship because, all of a sudden, you have no friends.”

– Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female

Career Concerns. Female focus group participants discussed professional reprisal as another form of retaliation that has the ability to dissuade Service members from reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment. In general, they agreed that while it exists, this type of retaliation is less of a concern than social retaliation, which takes many more forms and can be more harmful. Service members are more likely to trust those in their chain of command to support them if they were to report sexual assault or sexual harassment. Before deciding whether to report an incident, however, they said they would take into account all potential negative consequences, including negative career impact. They noted various forms of social retaliation can carry over professionally as well.

“Personally, I would think that if I were going to report something, I would consider many things before I did it. Like how is this going to affect my career? How will this affect my future? People label me as this troublemaker and then my future commands will be like, ‘Oh, yeah. I heard she was a troublemaker. How is that going to affect me?’ And sometimes you weigh those options.” – Navy Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Female

“You get passed over for certain opportunities. If you had a chance of being in a leadership position, you get passed over for someone else because they think you’re difficult. Or if a TDY [Temporary Duty] comes up, you can’t go on that TDY because they’re like, ‘We don’t really want to send that person because something might happen.’” – Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Female

Male Victims

When asked about male victims’ willingness to come forward to report sexual assault or sexual harassment, female Service member participants indicated that they believed their male colleagues would be hesitant to do so. Participants said there is pressure for male Service members to uphold a stereotypical masculine gender role. For example, these men believe they must appear strong, capable, in control, and not easily taken advantage of or rattled. Some female participants reported that they felt the military environment reinforces this stereotype because these same qualities can help make male Service members successful in many situations. Admitting to being sexually harassed or sexually assaulted undermines the image they want others to have of them as it presumably implies weakness, submissiveness, or loss of control. Therefore, female participants said their male counterparts are extremely unlikely to report experiencing these sexual assault or sexual harassment.

“[Regarding sexual harassment], It’s assumed [men] can stand up for themselves because [there’s] that image that men should just be able to take care of it on their own or they can’t take people joking....if it’s sexual assault, for a man, involving another man, then that involves your sexual orientation and possibly your gender identity, so it’s this bigger picture.”

– Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female

“If it was a male [who experiences sexual harassment or sexual assault], they probably wouldn’t report it.”

– Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female

Sexual Harassment-Specific Barriers

Female Service members in the focus groups stated that there are a number of reasons why fellow Service members might be less likely to report incidents of sexual harassment than sexual assault. First, participants said sexual harassment is inherently ambiguous or “gray,” which can make it challenging to recognize. Participants indicated that they believed the interpretation of what constitutes sexual harassment can vary depending on the perception of the person experiencing the behavior. As a result, Service members may be unsure if something reaches the level of sexual harassment or should be reported. Second, focus group participants said behaviors that could fall into the category of sexual harassment are somewhat normalized as part of the male-dominated military culture. These behaviors include sexually explicit jokes, sexual innuendo, and inappropriate or insulting comments about women’s appearance or gender. Female participants said such behaviors are often times dismissed by the chain of command as trivial, and at the same time, accepted by fellow female Service members as a cost to being in the military. They argued that rather than reporting sexual harassment, they are likely to let it “roll off their backs” because otherwise they would be seen as uptight and not a team player.

“As far as sexual harassment, you probably don’t really report it because in the shop, people joke around all the time...harassment and pictures, that’s normal for our generation.”

– Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female

“A lot of women have just kind of accepted at this point that you either go along with [sexual harassment] or you choose to get offended. And if you choose to get offended, then everyone hates you.”

– Air Force OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female

“It seems like sexual assaults, I know they’re not all cut and dry, but it’s like, that is a no-brainer. That is not acceptable...And it seems like sexual harassment is the part where it’s way more gray and there’s way more consideration of, ‘Do I really want to make a big deal about this? Is leadership really going to take that seriously?’”

– Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Female

Retaliation

Female Service members in the focus groups were asked about perceived retaliation, either social or professional, for reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment, and they shared several points of view with the male participants. A majority of participants thought that retaliation is fairly common. Social retaliation, in all its forms, was believed to occur more frequently than professional reprisal, and was likewise seen as a more significant deterrent to reporting. Female Service member participants said that they do not see much in the way of negative repercussions for those who retaliate, since these behaviors can be difficult to prove and they felt that the system in place for reporting retaliation is not efficient or trustworthy.

Social Retaliation

Female Service member participants viewed social retaliation as potentially the single most detrimental behavior in relation to reporting because of the powerful and long lasting negative impact it can have on a person's career and because it also poses the greatest barrier to reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment. Many participants across all Services claimed to know someone who had experienced this type of retaliatory behavior.

“I guess [it’s] a bit like [being a] whistle-blower, like, ‘Don’t tell that person anything. They’re obviously willing to take people to task.’ People choosing sides. People who don’t believe that person...But I think a lot of people reporting in the military, they’re concerned that somehow they’re marked for life and you can’t get away from it.”

– Air Force OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female

Professional Reprisal

Female Service member participants across all Services claimed professional reprisal is an issue of concern for their colleagues, and a potential deterrent to reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment, although in practice, it was unclear how frequently these types of behaviors actually occur. Most examples that were provided were hypothetical rather than references to actual cases people had experienced or witnessed.

“You [might] get a low, low EPR [Enlisted Performance Report]...Or you...just get comments made to you at work, ‘Oh, I don’t think she can handle that today because she’s not emotionally stable.’ Your integrity, everything is taken into question at that point. And...no one holds you at a professional level.”

– Air Force CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female

Social and Digital Media

Participants were asked to discuss the impact of social and digital media as it relates to gender relations.

Social Media

Female participants mentioned a range of social media applications that they and their colleagues use, including Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. When asked if anyone had heard of sexual exploitation (post or sharing of pictures or videos without the subject's consent) involving online or digital media, almost all of the participants said they had seen it, mostly on Facebook and the Snapchat application. Female participants said Snapchat facilitates the easy sharing of inappropriate photos, which is a common practice at installations. Many participants indicated that they felt these behaviors would not be reported or give cause to intervene.

Similar to their male counterparts, older female participants said they felt that the younger generation of Service members share personal and private content on these applications without regard to who will be seeing the content or the potential consequences.

“With the media and Facebook and Twitter these days, they’re just willing to share more than we were a long time ago. I mean, I got rid of Facebook because I would look at some of the things people were posting, and I’m like, ‘How could you post this?’ And then, at the same time say, ‘I don’t like people talking about me. I don’t like this. I don’t like that.’ ...They like sharing too much today.” – **Navy OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Sexual Harassment on Social Media

Participants pointed to Facebook as the most common application used to engage in harassment and inappropriate behavior, with both comments and images. Female Service members in the focus groups explained that Facebook comments have included things like, “send nudes.” Across all branches of military, female Service members were aware of inappropriate groups on Facebook.

“There’s a site on Facebook. And ultimately, people go and post photos, sexual whatever it may be—just a photo, right? And then these peripherals have various groups and pages. So security force may have one, maintenance definitely has one, munitions has one. And in those pages, [photo sharing]. Photos are posted probably not with consent, for sure.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Although, participants also indicated that not all online harassment takes the form of traditionally sexually charged content—other females are harassed for seemingly benign appearances online.

“My old CO, they took a picture of her Facebook page with her and a couple other girls while they were on deployment and put it on the page. It was like, ‘Look at these wooks.’ So it wasn’t all sexual pictures. It was just pictures.” – **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

Reporting. Many female participants were aware that even though these groups or inappropriate behaviors exist or occur online, there would be no intervention from military leadership or personnel, or if there was, it would be minimal intervention.

“This guy tagged this female in this horrible comment, and then a bunch of people in that unit commented on it saying some pretty awful things. And then they’re friends with all these people on Facebook and all the people commenting. Safe to assume some staff saw it because they’re old friends, and they just laughed about it. And he did change what he said about it. I think something happened where he had to change it, but he never actually took it down.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

Female Service members in the sessions were confident that their female counterparts would remove or report inappropriate comments, images, or videos if they were aware of it.

“I feel very confident that if I, or one of my female friends, saw it, that we would tell, warn all the others. I like to be confident someone would take it to leadership and it would be settled, but I feel more confident that people would be like, ‘Hey, I don’t know if you do send pictures to people, but don’t do that because there’s this [expletive] Facebook group.’”
– **Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Women Criticizing Other Women. Many female participants criticized other online behavior from female Service members at their installation. Some participants criticized the appearance of or flirtatious and inappropriate behavior of female Service members and what they shared online.

“It’s mostly other females lashing out at other females. And they’ll post like, ‘Oh, look. She’s a big [expletive]. She’s a [expletive].’ Or when I was pregnant, I experienced so much backlash from everyone because it was my fault for getting pregnant or, ‘You’re in the military. You’re just trying to get out by getting pregnant,’ or something like that. And I would find, constantly, pictures or posts or just from other females talking about me because I was pregnant.” – **Air Force CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

Image Sharing

Revenge Porn. Many Service members who participated in the sessions have heard of revenge porn, or sharing sexually explicit photos of a person without his or her consent in an act of reprisal for a perceived wrong (this could be ending the relationship, cheating, etc.). Many female participants indicated that they felt it was common on base, and some indicated that they would not feel sympathy for women who became victims of revenge porn because these women had chosen to send the photo in the first place and were presumably aware of the risk that the photo might be shared.

“You have this guy that you talk to, right, and he’s like, ‘Oh my God. Send me pictures.’ And you’re like, ‘Oh my God. Sure!’ And then you’re like, ‘You know what? I really don’t like this, so bye.’ And he’s like, ‘Okay.’ And then you get a message from his friend...So the guy’s friend messages said friend. And he was like, ‘So I got these pictures of you.’ And it’s like, ‘What?’ ...I felt bad for the girl, but then again, I didn’t feel bad for the girl. So when her pictures leaked, I think it’s on both parties, their fault. Girl should have looked out for herself, he didn’t need a picture.”

– Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female

Shared Drive. In addition to sharing photos across text message and social media, participants indicated that their male counterparts share and save photos to shared military drives. Females in the sessions indicated that military leadership seemed to be aware of this issue and were trying to address it.

“We search the LAN for any pictures that you don’t need to see... the amount of [expletive] pictures that you see get sent across, or the wives, or the not wives, sending stuff to their friends and saving it. They have secret paths, like training manuals and stuff like that, where you would think to not look.”

– Navy CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female

Changes Over Time

Participants were asked to discuss how issues related to sexual assault and sexual harassment have changed over time. Focal areas that emerged included an emphasis on prevention, tolerance of sexual assault and sexual harassment, and changing attitudes related to prevention.

Emphasis on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Prevention

Attitude

The overall climate and understanding of sexual assault and sexual harassment was viewed as one of the biggest shifts over time in the military by female focus group participants. Female Service members in the focus groups reported feeling that there were positive changes in leadership’s emphasis on sexual assault and sexual harassment, reporting behaviors, consequences for alleged perpetrators, and general discussions around gender-related issues. Many Service member participants viewed the increases in formal reports as a positive change, noting that the number of assaults may not be going up, but the number of victims willing to come forward to file a report has increased due to a shift in the environment and the military’s effort to create appropriate recourses.

“This is an issue. We need to solve it. It keeps coming up. It’s good it’s getting caught. It’s being reported, and that might be why it keeps coming up on the docket. It keeps happening again. Maybe not that it’s happening more, just people are actually coming forward and reporting it. People are

getting out now and saying something, and people are actually being held to the zero tolerance and getting repercussions for it.”

– **Air Force CONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Tolerance of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

Female Service members in the focus groups noted that behaviors and comments that were once brushed off as a part of the culture are now taken seriously, including the display of sexual imagery, crude comments, and inappropriate jokes. Individuals who engage in inappropriate gender-related behaviors may now face consequences for behaviors that in the past may have been regarded as the norm.

“I think they’re less tolerant of sexual assault and people that are discriminating against women or race or religion. I think it’s definitely tightened down a little bit.” – **Air Force CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

Focus on Alleged Perpetrator Versus Victim

Female Service member participants noted a change in attitude related to the accusations, specifically the shift in focus toward believing the accuser. Many female participants indicated that leadership had begun to stop taking action against the victim, and instead focus on the accused. Female Service member participants expressed that they were glad to see this change as it moves away from potentially revictimizing the victim.

“When I first came in, it was always the victim that was being removed and segregated. That’s not necessarily the case anymore, which I think is a good change that we’ve come across throughout this process. So leadership’s not necessarily destroying what the victim had worked up to that point in time.”
– **Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

“After being in for about 10 years now—or over 10 years—I’ve seen a lot of changes. And the whole victim blaming is still going on. However, I know for a fact that the whole SHARP program had changed from focusing on the victim to focusing on the perpetrator. And how to identify and address the perpetrator instead of the victims... I think we’re heading in the right direction.” – **Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Female**

Resources

Focus group participants also pointed to an increase in resources (the most noted resource being additional counselors or staff available) for victims of sexual assault as a positive change in the military’s efforts to address issues related to sexual assault. Some Service member participants stated that the increase in availability and accessibility of resources and more proactive approaches to prevention provide a much improved cultural shift related to sexual assault and sexual harassment on installations.

“Well, they’ve added in the UVA. I know Uniform Victim Advocate was not [around] when I was a junior Marine. Also, the commanding officers take a more proactive approach to that topic. For almost every safety stand down, they talk about it during the 101 Days of Summer. And it’s encouraged through the climate surveys to ask questions like that. So it’s come up a lot more than what it was when I was a junior Marine. Obviously, the tolerance level for it has decreased”

– **Marine Corps CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Sexual Paraphernalia

Some participants said the culture is changing, as there are no longer sexually explicit paraphernalia, such as calendars or posters, posted publically, which is a marked change from the past. Participants attributed this shift to the digital and social media age, noting that instead of posting printed materials in easily observable locations, Service members instead look at explicit images or videos on their personal devices.

“Twenty years ago, you probably would have seen Playboy calendars everywhere. Now, you don’t anymore because people are saying, ‘I don’t want to see that crap at work. I don’t want to see it in your locker. I don’t want to see it anywhere where I can see it.’ ...If somebody’s doing something like that, you need to pull him to the side and say, ‘Take that crap down. It’s not wanted. We don’t need it. You need a calendar? We’ll order you a calendar from GSA, and I bet you any money it doesn’t have Playgirls or Playboys on it.’” – **Navy OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Undercover Harassment

Some female participants noted that while on the surface it seemed harassment behaviors had lessened or disappeared, many of these behaviors still happen, but are less visible. In other words, inappropriate gender-related behaviors are now less overt and more covert in nature. Participants reported that they felt the increased emphasis on preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment had driven behavior more “underground.”

“I think it’s undercover more...I think people are just more aware of certain people not hearing it so that they don’t get in trouble. I’ve had to correct people in certain instances when they don’t think that I’m able to hear. And then when you make the correction, then they just make sure that you don’t hear it. And then I’ve also encountered senior leaders saying inappropriate things when they don’t think anyone else is around. When they’re talking to other more senior people, they think that they’re in that safe zone or whatever, in the circle of trust or whatever...It’s more under the radar because people are aware that people are watching and that there are repercussions.” – **Army OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female**

Negative Changes Related to Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Although most female Service member participants indicated feeling that the more proactive approach to prevention was positive, some Service member participants criticized changes in the military's approach toward sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention. Some participants said they felt that the current approach to addressing inappropriate gender-related behavior emphasizes using extreme measures and formal consequences rather than a conversation between parties involved to resolve issues.

“I believe we’re now in a—‘I won’t tell you if you say something to offend me. I’m gone to bring you up on charges instead.’ You don’t have to have a mature approach and say, ‘Hey, please don’t talk about that around me,’ like we used to. I think now, we just say, ‘I’m just going to bring you up on charges and let it fall where it will.’”

– Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Female

Many participants also reported feeling uncomfortable with the more extreme consequences of participating in a behavior (e.g., a base transfer or a formal action or reprimand from senior leadership), the increased frequency of investigations, and the general fear of being accused of acting inappropriately. Some female participants noted that their male counterparts fear being accused of acting inappropriately and that this has changed how female and male Service members relate to each other. More specifically, male Service members' more cautious attitude can hinder the development of friendships or romantic relationships between male and female Service members because their actions might be misinterpreted by others.

“These guys who, even though I might have that relationship with them, they’re even afraid to touch me because what if someone else sees that and then that person has this perception, and now they get [in trouble]. Plus, our unit’s investigation happy on everything. It’s definitely changed their attitudes, their behaviors, things like that.”

– Army OCONUS, Senior Officer, Female

In addition, some female Service members in the focus groups criticized the training offered by the SAPR/SHARP programs. Participants indicated that training is often ineffective and too frequent. Those who are not in the Air Force referred back to the Green Dot training as more effective and engaging than the training they were currently required to complete.

“Just [death by] PowerPoint. That’s what I feel has happened...Everybody just signs off on a muster report and leaves. We really don’t get the training. I’ve done it a few times. So then it was like, ‘Okay. Everybody, mandatory. You guys are going to stay here. We’re going to give the PowerPoint and then someone’s going to talk about it.’ All right... We really don’t take it that serious because so many times, we have to do this over and over again. It’s

kind of repetitive. We keep doing it but the training's not helping."
– Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female

Chapter 4: Discussion

The findings from the *2017 Military Service Gender Relations (2017 MSGR) Focus Groups* that are presented in this report are the result of the Office of People Analytics' effort to assess the current climate around sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other gender-related issues within the active duty military force in 2017 through focus groups at seven installations. This chapter summarizes key themes voiced by focus group participants across the Services while identifying gaps illustrated by the research.

Key Themes Voiced by Participants of Focus Groups

Looking across the seven installations, some overarching themes and opportunities identified by the participants came to the surface. These themes were: the influence of leadership, the discomfort around sexual assault and sexual harassment, the masculine culture and its effects on reporting, and the sharing of sexual images on social and digital media.

Influence of Leadership

Previous research has demonstrated that leadership's attitude toward sexual assault and sexual harassment influences the gender dynamics in organizations and work groups (e.g., Sadler et al., 2017; DMDC, 2016). Members of the *2017 MSGR Focus Groups* voiced that leaders—in the form of both officers and senior enlisted members—play an important role in preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment through their actions. Participants expressed the importance of leading by example and creating an environment of “no tolerance” for inappropriate gender-related behaviors. Also, leaders who show support for gender equality—not just through their words but also through their actions—are viewed in a positive light.

“I think setting the example is a huge part of it, in both the things you do, the way you act and carry yourself. And just personally what kind of activities you engage in.” – **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

“I hear it's not tolerated a lot, but at the same time, the same commanders or the same leadership are also joking about it within closed doors or their close little group.” – **Air Force CONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

Despite the important role they play, there was a lack of consensus among participants on leadership's engagement in prevention efforts. Male participants expressed that leadership makes a concerted effort to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment on installations, whereas female participants noted that some immediate supervisors do not

set a consistent tone with respect to appropriate gender-related behaviors.

Additionally, some senior male participants, who considered themselves to be members of leadership, expressed their hesitancy to engage in sexual assault prevention efforts or to encourage reporting. These participants indicated that they feel uncomfortable discussing gender-related topics and fear the potential of being brought up on SAPR/SHARP-related charges if they engage in talking about these issues, even if the focus of the conversation is on prevention and response. According to focus group participants, this discomfort also presents itself in how some male leaders might feel afraid to interact with female Service members.

“I had a civilian career before coming into the military and the first thing that shocked me is how uncomfortable male leadership is to manage females. And is to this day still.” – Navy CONUS, Junior Officer, Male

Participants engaged in lengthy discussions focused on the training provided by the SAPR/SHARP programs. Many participants indicated that leadership’s attitudes toward training colored their own attitudes toward training. In regards to SAPR/SHARP training, both male and

“The chief is there to train the junior officers and to train the junior enlisted, and to make sure that the standards are held at that level. That’s part of their primary role in the Navy. And so, when you’re talking about upholding the standards, it’s not just the standards of doing work. It’s the standards of what is acceptable behavior, and what is not acceptable behavior. If you’ve got a good Chief’s mess, then you’re going to have a good culture that doesn’t tolerate [sexual harassment]. And it’s all about people that we have in that role.” – Navy CONUS, Senior Officer, Female

female participants commented that the training was valuable the first time it was received, but repeated presentations of the same training was ineffective. Participants indicated that they believed this view was sometimes reinforced by a supervisor’s treatment of SAPR/SHARP training. In particular, if leadership treated training as “checking the box,” Service members were more likely to view training simply as a compliance activity rather than an opportunity to learn.

According to focus group participants, leadership also plays an important role in influencing bystander intervention. Leaders who reinforce positive behaviors and praise those who intervene were seen as supporters of intervention efforts. Participants, including

those in leadership positions, discussed the importance of creating a positive culture that sets clear standards for what is and is not acceptable behavior.

Confusion About Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Research has shown that men are significantly more likely to accept myths about rape culture than women (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Throughout the discussions during the 2017 MSGR Focus Groups, numerous male participants were under the misperception that “false reports” of sexual assault and sexual harassment occur frequently at their installation and within their Service, whereas female participants did not share this belief. Further, female participants said they felt male Service members perpetuate the belief that false reporting is a common occurrence. These female Service member participants also stated that the belief that false

reporting is a common occurrence creates a stigma around reporting incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Some participants also noted that this belief could affect interactions between men and women due to male Service members' fear of being brought up on unwarranted SAPR/SHARP-related charges.

Male Service members in the focus groups expressed varying degrees of confidence in how to appropriately interact with female Service members. This discomfort regarding interacting with female Service members stemmed in part from concerns about being accused of sexual assault or sexual harassment. Some male participants explained that they are afraid they might say or do something unintentionally inappropriate or might potentially offend someone, resulting in some male Service members exercising caution when interacting with female colleagues.

“I think that beforehand, they feel attacked every time you mention SAPR, every time you mention sexual assault. And they’re scared because they feel like no matter what they do, even if they’re in the right—because it’s both sides that come in the wrong. That no matter what they do, they’ll be blamed for whatever situation they happen to be in or put themselves in.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Senior Enlisted, Female**

“Any small, little thing could be taken as sexual harassment because everybody’s so different, everybody grew up different; everybody is offended by different things.”
– **Marine Corps OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

Many male participants indicated believing that behaviors that comprise sexual harassment are subjective and, therefore, difficult to interpret. These participants reported believing that some Service members are unaware that their behaviors or comments toward other Service members might be considered sexual harassment. Meanwhile, most female participants

indicated that they have become accustomed to some types of sexual harassment (e.g., inappropriate touching, comments, jokes) from Service members, believing that their male colleagues do not view these inappropriate behaviors as potentially harmful or as reaching the threshold to be considered sexual harassment. Some female participants also said they believed they are conditioned to accept sexual harassment behaviors as a natural consequence of working in a traditionally male-dominated environment.

Both male and female Service members who participated in the focus groups expressed confusion about consent and alcohol use with respect to both sexual assault and sexual harassment. Both male and female participants across the installations in the study reported that determining sexual consent is difficult or a “gray area” if both parties have been drinking. Several participants concurred that alcohol is a prevalent factor in cases of sexual assault. Alcohol use was viewed as lowering a person’s inhibitions as well as impairing judgment and decision-making abilities, making people susceptible to either perpetrating or becoming a victim of sexual assault. Furthermore, Service members who participated in the focus groups indicated that they believed that some individuals who commit sexual assault or sexual harassment use alcohol as an excuse for their behaviors

Male-Dominated Culture

Work environments with a disproportionately high number of men have been associated with increased rates of sexual harassment (Firestone & Harris, 2009; MacKinnon, 1979). The focus group participants described their workplace culture as male-dominated, and sometimes characterized by inappropriate gender-related jokes and scenarios that could be perceived as sexual harassment.

Participants also explained that their work environment can be lacking in professionalism at times, which may be both a cause and effect of inappropriate gender-related behaviors. Focus group participants acknowledged that the masculine culture may discourage victims—both male and female—from reporting sexual harassment or sexual assault because they may believe these behaviors are, to some degree, normal for the environment.

“I think a lot of it has to do with masculinity and embarrassment and what will your friends think? And what does my family think? Would I still be able to be the same man I was once before I came over here?” – **Army OCONUS, Junior Officer, Male**

Male participants indicated that they were split as to whether they would feel comfortable reporting their own experiences, and also whether they would be supportive of Service members who reported sexual assault or sexual harassment. Male participants who indicated that they would choose not to report noted that they would not want to be perceived as less masculine or as unable to handle a situation on their own. Both male and female participants said they believed male Service members are less likely than female Service members to report incidents of sexual assault or sexual harassment. Female participants noted a number of barriers to reporting incidents of sexual assault, including the involvement of alcohol, preexisting relationships, the rank of the alleged perpetrator, fear of social or professional reprisal, as well as the length and complexity of the investigation process.

Throughout the focus groups, participants were asked to comment on what changes they had seen during their time in the military with respect to gender-related issues. Both male and female participants noted an environmental shift in the military and work place, stating that behaviors that were once deemed “part of the culture” are now considered unacceptable, including the display of sexual imagery, crude comments, and inappropriate jokes. However, some participants said they believed the former culture still exists but is more covert and less

“And I will be very honest. As a female, I have become a little desensitized to a lot of the things that, as a woman, may not be okay. When you are in such a male-dominated group, I was not the way that I am now like before. So you do become a little desensitized.” – **Air Force OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Female**

perceived as less masculine or as unable to

“I mean, I think for any of us that deployed to Iraq, in the early years it would not be uncommon to maybe see in a work center a picture from a magazine and it displayed on a wall where now it’s very clear that guidance has passed that it’s not acceptable. So it’s a more, I would say, conducive and healthy environment for females.” – **Marine Corps CONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male**

explicit in nature.

Another change identified by male participants was that they believed there had been an increase in the number of male victims willing to come forward and file a formal complaint for both sexual assault and sexual harassment. This increase was attributed to the more positive attitudes younger Service members have toward reporting, as well as their understanding about what constitutes unwanted sexual behaviors.

Digital and Social Media

Sharing and distribution of sexual images on social and digital media has become prevalent in society (Klettke et al., 2014). In recent years, the sharing of nonconsensual or exploitive imagery in the form of “revenge porn” and other less malicious forms of file sharing has gained attention due to well-known incidents such as the “Marines United” scandal. Focus group participants claimed that they were aware of Service members consensually and nonconsensually sharing these types of images and videos and that it is common for Service members, and

“I can’t sympathize for the females that send those photos out to people. I understand you sent it to someone, but, if it’s your boyfriend, I hope you trust your boyfriend enough to where he doesn’t send it to his homies and that he only keeps it for himself for his own pleasure, but when you’re a girl... they’re sharing their sexting to every dude that they encounter. It’s just I can’t feel bad for you. I really can’t. So when that incident came out and it’s all these females, the Marine females, and I’ve met some Marine females, I can’t feel bad for them because that’s how they are.” – Navy OCONUS, Junior Enlisted, Male

especially young Service members, to share sexually explicit images or messages through social media platforms and texting. Participants also discussed other ways in which these images and videos are shared, including the use of shared drives and “bumping” phones.

Some male participants indicated that they have shared photos, but do not believe this behavior was inappropriate or warranted punishment. Other Service members in the focus group sessions indicated they do not see these behaviors as rising to the level where they would need to intervene. Female participants were more confident that their female counterparts would remove or report inappropriate comments, images, or videos if they were made aware of them, but many felt they would not know whether image sharing occurred. Although most focus group

attendees were aware of “revenge porn,” they generally stated that they would not be sympathetic toward victims of revenge porn. More specifically, some participants shared the belief that victims of revenge porn should have been aware of any potential consequences that resulted from their choice to send sexual material.

Many participants stated that social media makes it easier to engage in behaviors that potentially align with sexual harassment due to a higher degree of anonymity and distance from the harm caused to the victim compared to face-to-face interaction.

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Appendix A. FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

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Military Services Gender Relations Focus Groups (MSGR2017): Protocol

Note: The following is meant to guide a discussion. Based on the discussion all questions may not be asked and all respondents may not answer each question.

Handouts with definitions of Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment, and retaliation (including as ostracism, maltreatment, reprisal) will be provided to participants.

Part 1: Introduction to the Focus Group (10 Minutes)

Hello everyone. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today. My name is _____. My colleagues, _____ are here on behalf of the DoD's Office of People Analytics, also known as OPA. I will be leading today's discussion.

I want to mention a couple of things before we get started.

- This is intended to be a conversation among peers. I know we are on a military installation and there are policies in place for how to act and when to speak. For the purposes of this discussion you are encouraged to speak freely as peers. What you have to say could help us gain valuable insights and impact larger changes. In addition, I was hired to run this focus group so you won't hurt my feelings or offend me with whatever you say. I don't have a personal stake in these results.
- There are no wrong answers. You all are the experts on the topics we plan to discuss, and I'm here to listen to you and get your perspective. Please speak up, especially if what you have to say is different than what someone else is saying. You may represent what a lot of other people think.
- We are not trying to come to a consensus. It's OK for there to be disagreement and in fact I welcome different points of view. Please share what is true for you. In the spirit of this, I ask that you remain respectful of each other's opinions during our discussion. Everyone in this room may see things differently and we want to hear everyone's perspective.
- Your participation is completely voluntary, meaning that you do not have to answer every question and you can withdraw from this study at any time. However, I do encourage your full participation today to ensure that I am getting a representative response.
- We will be audio-recording comments but will not be recording names or other identifying information. By staying in the room and continuing to participate, you are giving your consent to be audio-recorded. We are interested in what is being said, not who is saying what. The audio files will be transcribed and then destroyed after 90 days.
- This is a non-attribution session. To the extent permitted by law, OPA does not publish or share anything outside this room that can be attributed to any one of you specifically. We ask for your cooperation in protecting the privacy of the comments made within this session by not saying anything that would identify you or other participants. For example, do not state your name. In addition, we also ask that you do not discuss the focus group proceedings after you leave. We have provided you with additional information about protecting your anonymity in your handout.

Today, we will be discussing sensitive topics of gender-related issues, including sexual assault and harassment. I know this can be a fairly awkward topic to discuss and potentially one that you have not discussed frequently before, but it is an important discussion to have. I want to emphasize that we are here to learn from you and your perceptions here, so please feel free to speak candidly.

You were randomly selected for this focus group from the members of your installation. Your knowledge and experiences offer valuable insight on these important issues. However, I do not want to discuss any specific cases of sexual assault or sexual harassment. I would like to discuss these issues more generally so we can provide guidance to leadership to create the best environment possible for you.

The information you provide today is part of a larger study that will help DoD leadership to better understand gender-related issues here as well as at other installations.

In the interest of time, we may need to move on from one topic to get to another area of interest.

Does anyone have any questions?

To get us started, I'd like to take a moment to go around the room and get to know each other a little bit better.

Can you tell us about your favorite hobby or pastime that you engage in to relax when off duty?

Part 2: General Culture (14 Minutes)*Leadership and General Attitudes*

1. When you think about leadership at this installation, who comes to mind?
2. Who “sets the tone” for how things work around here? [prompt – influence with overall climate, leading by example, informal leaders]
 - a. Who else influences the unit in a helpful or unhelpful way?
 - b. In what way are they shaping thoughts and behaviors?
 - c. How might they shape how people think about sexual assault?
3. In general, what type of emphasis has leadership placed on issues of sexual assault?
4. What would you say is the role of senior enlisted leaders around issues of sexual assault?
5. How might men and women view issues of sexual assault differently?
6. [OCONUS]: How might the conditions be different here in [location] than on bases in the U.S., especially with regard to issues of sexual assault?

Changes over time

1. How has the way the [service] addresses issues of sexual assault changed over time?
2. How may attitudes have changed in some leaders related to sexual assault and harassment?
 - a. Have these attitudes stayed the same, gotten better, or gotten worse?

Part 3: Perceptions of the SAPR/SHARP Program (16 Minutes)

General SAPR/SHARP

1. When I say SAPR/SHARP what are some words that come to mind? [prompt – what kinds of SAPR/SHARP trainings have you received? How effective are they?]

Trainings

1. What features of training did you find helpful? And unhelpful?
2. When you receive training related to sexual assault or harassment, how might different groups of people be portrayed differently?
 - a. Are some groups singled out as potential perpetrators?
 - i. Which groups?
 - ii. How does this effect how trainings are received?
 - b. How are military men versus women depicted in these trainings?
 - i. What types of behaviors are portrayed when men are victims of sexual harassment or sexual assault?
 - ii. What types of behaviors might arise when a man is initiated into a group? How would this be similar to or different from sexual harassment or sexual assault?
 - iii. What types of behaviors might arise when a man is excessively teased/taunted/intimidated? How would this be similar to or different from sexual harassment or sexual assault?
3. What aspects of training have service members been able to practice in “hypothetical” situations? (e.g. role play in training or simulated environment)
4. How might someone use skills learned in training to help prevent sexual harassment or sexual assault?
5. What actions does leadership take to encourage and reinforce trainings to prevent sexual harassment and sexual assault?
6. What actions does leadership take that potentially detract from or weaken training on sexual harassment and sexual assault?

Resources

1. When thinking about the resources and services SAPR/SHARP provides, what comes to mind?
 - a. How well do those resources meet the needs of men and women at this installation?
 - b. What additional services could be provided?
 - c. What are some ways in which men and women might use these services differently?

Part 4: Bystander Intervention (14 Minutes)*Sexual Assault, Harassment and Exploitation*

1. What might sexual harassment at this installation look like?
 - a. How might sexual harassment be different for men versus women?
 - b. How might people who overheard or saw this behavior react?
2. Can you talk about how people might publicly post or show sexual pictures of another person?
 - a. How might a woman seeing or hearing of these pictures react? How about a man?
3. What are some social situations at and around this installation that could be seen as red flags potentially leading to sexual assault?
 - a. How might a red flag situation or behavior be different for men versus women?
 - b. How might people who overheard or saw this behavior react?

Barriers

To improve the prevention of sexual harassment and sexual assault, we'd like to better understand situations that may impede intervention.

1. What are some reasons someone might not step in if they were to see a high risk situation for sexual assault?
 - a. What does a high risk situation look like?
 - b. What about that situation and the people involved make it difficult to intervene?
 - c. How might the authority of the alleged offender impact an observer's behavior?
 - d. What are ways SAPR can encourage people to intervene?
2. What are some reasons someone might not get involved or step in if they saw or heard of sexual harassment?
 - a. How might the authority of the alleged offender impact an observer's behavior?
 - b. What about that situation and the people involved make it difficult to intervene?
3. How might a service member who spoke up or stepped in be perceived by others around him or her?
 - a. How might the rank of the alleged offender impact an observer's behavior?
 - b. What about that situation and the people involved made it easier to intervene?
4. What are some reasons someone might not get involved or step in if they saw or heard of sexual pictures being shown or posted?

Part 5: Alcohol (12 Minutes)

1. What are some policies and procedures around alcohol at this installation?
2. What role does alcohol play in socializing with your colleagues?
 - a. How often is alcohol involved?
 - b. How much alcohol is involved?
 - c. How might it be used in initiation rituals or rites of passage?
3. How do underage service members access alcohol?
 - a. How is alcohol consumption different between underage and of age service members?
 - i. Where do they consume it?
 - ii. How much do they consume?
 - iii. How might it be used in initiation rituals or rites of passage?
4. What are the attitudes towards people who do not drink alcohol?
5. What kind of tone, if any, does your unit leadership set around alcohol consumption while socializing with other service members?
6. How do you think a situation involving sexual assault might differ when people are drinking compared to when they are sober?
 - a. How does drinking alcohol factor into consent for sexual activities?
 - b. How does drinking alcohol impact behavior?
7. Describe responsible alcohol use messages you received during training. Which messages were helpful and which ones were not?
 - a. What are the most effective methods of communicating these messages? Why?

Part 6: Reporting and Retaliation (14 Minutes)*Reporting*

1. What is the general attitude toward reporting allegations of sexual assault?
 - a. What about allegations of sexual harassment?
 - b. How might someone who has reported sexual assault allegations be treated? [prompt – teasing/taunting? Forced to engage in unwanted activities such as excessive drinking?]
2. What are some of the resources available to someone during the reporting process?
 - a. Let's talk a little bit more about the SARC and Victim advocates, when you think of these resources what words come to mind?
 - b. What can you tell me about Special Victims' Counsel/Victims' Legal Counsel (SVC/VLC)?

Retaliation

1. What are the consequences of reporting sexual assault allegations?
 - a. What kind of social consequences might someone experience?
 - b. How about professional consequences?
2. Do Service members who report allegations that they perceive to be sexual assault or harassment experience any sort of backlash or retaliation for doing so?
 - a. What types of actions or behaviors constitute backlash or retaliatory behavior?
 - b. How might retaliation for a sexual assault report be different from retaliation for a sexual harassment report?
 - c. What might motivate someone to retaliate?
 - d. How might social media be used to retaliate?
3. What types of resources are available for those who believe they are retaliated against because they report sexual misconduct?
 - a. How do you contact these resources?
 - b. Do people use these resources?

Part 7: Prevention (8 minutes)

We'd like to stop sexual assault before it starts – that's called prevention.

1. Where have you heard about sexual assault prevention?
 - a. What do messages around sexual assault prevention entail?
 - b. What methods of communication about prevention are the most effective? Why?
2. How might leaders at this installation or command show support for sexual assault prevention?
3. What is the role of senior enlisted leaders in prevention?
4. How can leaders be more supportive in encouraging people to step in if they saw a situation at risk for sexual assault?
5. Without naming names, what types of people could help change attitudes about sexual assault and sexual harassment [prompt – can you describe their role, personality or other characteristics about them?]
6. What ways does your installation or command show that sexual assault; sexual harassment and/or showing or posting of sexual pictures are not accepted?
7. What topics should be covered in training around healthy relationships and communication?
8. What do you think about self-defense courses being offered to help men and women feel able to prevent sexual assault?
 - a. How helpful do you think those courses are for people who have taken them?
 - b. What are some useful aspects and less useful ones of the course?
 - c. How might you improve these courses to aid in preventing sexual assault?

Part 8: Conclusion (2 Minutes)

1. We are just about ready to wrap up, but before we finish, are there any last comments you wanted to add to the discussion?

We want to thank you for your time today in this focus group session. We will not tie any of your comments back to you; to help us ensure privacy, please do not discuss the specifics of what was said here today with others after you leave. Our goal is to provide the best data possible, and you have helped us greatly today with your comments and insights.

Thank you again for your participation.

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